KHRUSHCHEV'S CORN CRUSADE: THE INDUSTRIAL IDEAL AND AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE IN THE ERA OF POST-STALIN REFORM, 1953–1964

Aaron Todd Hale-Dorrell

A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History.

Chapel Hill
2014

Approved by:

Donald J. Raleigh

Louise McReynolds

Christopher R. Browning

Chad Bryant

Anna Krylova

© 2014
Aaron Todd Hale-Dorrell
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Aaron Todd Hale-Dorrell: Khrushchev's Corn Crusade: The Industrial Ideal and Agricultural Practice in the Era of Post-Stalin Reform, 1953–1964
(Under the direction of Donald J. Raleigh)

A study of N. S. Khrushchev's crusade to make the USSR into a powerhouse corn producer, this dissertation sheds light on policy, governance, and life on Soviet collective farms in the post-Stalin decade, 1953–64. Neither "contradictory" nor "irrational," as scholars have maintained, this agricultural program derived its rationale from the American model of corn-based industrial agriculture that, after World War II, spread to industrial countries and to the Third World, where it became known as "the Green Revolution." Inspired by the results that modern technologies—chemicals, machines, hybrids—were achieving, Khrushchev developed policies that linked the USSR to transnational currents in agriculture, which took its place among the many spheres in which Soviet practices paralleled global trends. Expecting these initiatives to boost Soviet farms' productivity and to make the abundance heralding the communist utopia a reality, Khrushchev never lost faith that corn would rectify a chronic shortage of the livestock feed required to produce the meat and milk the USSR needed "to catch up with and overtake America." By enriching citizens' diets and providing them a better life, Khrushchev hoped to seize a victory in the Cold War competition with capitalism and to win over Third World "hearts and minds" for the socialist cause. Drawing on documents from central and local archives, I investigate how officials and peasants implemented Khrushchev's policies, revealing the remarkable capacity of collective farmers and of officialdom to sidestep orders at every turn. As a result, the agrarian reforms proved imperfect and the returns, although substantial, did not match Khrushchev's pledges, thereby sapping his legitimacy. Industrial farming thrived in social, economic, and climatic conditions around the world, but in

the Soviet Union these methods were thwarted by policy failures, ingrained bureaucratic norms, the climate, Khrushchev's own mistakes, widespread deceit by subordinates, and a labor crisis on the collective farms. These challenges remained to confront future reformers, but Khrushchev's efforts left a legacy that made industrial principles—and corn—a part of Soviet farming practice throughout subsequent decades.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many people and institutions have helped me along the way that the effort to thank them all seems destined to come up short. Nonetheless, I must try. First, I would be negligent if I failed to mention Nina Petrovna Grigor'eva, whose stories nurtured my interest in Soviet history, and whose frequent use of the word "*kukuruznik*" to describe Khrushchev nudged me toward selecting this topic. As the research got underway, I benefitted from the generous aid from the University of Illinois Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center's Summer Research Lab, and from the expertise of the reference librarians of the Slavic Reference Service. During my graduate studies, I received FLAS funding from Duke University's Center for Slavic, Eurasian, and East European Studies, and aid from the Summer Institute for Conducting Archival Research at George Washington University. My predissertation research received support from the Department of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2011 and 2012, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Institute for International Education funded archival research in the former Soviet Union. A generous Dissertation Completion Fellowship from the UNC Graduate School assisted in the second and final year of writing.

In Moscow, Kyiv, Vilnius, and Stavropol, the many archivists at RGANI, RGASPI, GARF, RGAE, and the other archives offered professional advice and aid. Two deserve my special thanks for creating a welcoming and friendly atmosphere, which made trudging to the archive through a Moscow winter an inviting prospect: Galina Mikhailovna Tokareva of RGASPI and Liudmila Ivanovna Stepanich of RGANI. In Moscow, many scholars offered timely and helpful advice, including Don Filtzer and Elena Zubkova. Without Saulius Grybkauskas, my research trip to Vilnius could not have happened. Markian Dobczansky made my stay in Kyiv possible. In Moscow, fellow graduate students made the archives fun, offered intellectual stimulation, and

helped me remember to take a break and have a good time. I was lucky to work, have lunch, and drink tea alongside many fantastic colleagues, including Lindsey Martin, Adrianne Jacobs, Sylvain Dufraisse, Maya Holzman, Ben Sawyer, and Lucy Dunlop. Others made Moscow, despite being the most overwhelming of cities, a home: *spasibo*, *danke*, *merci*, and thanks, respectively, to Polina Demchuk, Martina Metzler, Jules Birchler, and Robin Brooks.

I must thank the many faculty, fellow graduate students, and staff who make the History Department at Carolina a stimulating and inviting place for graduate study. Violet Anderson and Joy Jones made everything work, from teaching assignments to paperwork. In seminars, in the Department Research Colloquium, or over a beer at happy hour, my fellow graduate students made the department a real community. Adam Domby deserves special mention here for his expertise in GIS software, which made the maps possible. Members of the Russianist *kollektiv*, especially Jen Parks, Marko Dumančić, Mike Paulauskas, Emily Baran, Edward Geist, Adrianne Jacobs, Andrew Ringlee, Dan Giblin, Gary Guadagnolo, and Stephen Reigg, helped make Carolina a great place to be a Russian historian. Their advice and support through each step of the process made surviving comps and plowing through grant applications if not exactly a pleasure, then at least a survivable battle. Our Carolina Seminar, "Russia and Its Empires, East and West," also offered a stimulating environment for discussion and, when the time came, feedback on my own work. Many of the same people contributed to that forum, but I must also thank Jeff Jones for his enthusiasm for Soviet history and for his willingness to talk Carolina basketball; occasionally, he even let me get in a word about the Hoosiers. The faculty members with whom I worked as a student and teaching assistant made it a joy to be a part of the department at Carolina. In particular, Chad Bryant, Christopher Browning, Donald Reid, and Louise McReynolds have aided my education and this dissertation in many ways large and small. At several key points, Anna Krylova offered thought-provoking feedback sure to strengthen this project as it advances to the next stage. Most of all, I cannot express the depth of my gratitude to Donald J. Raleigh, whose guidance helped me navigate the many steps along the

path through graduate school. His personal warmth and dedication to mentoring have made the past seven years, although always a challenge, truly a pleasure.

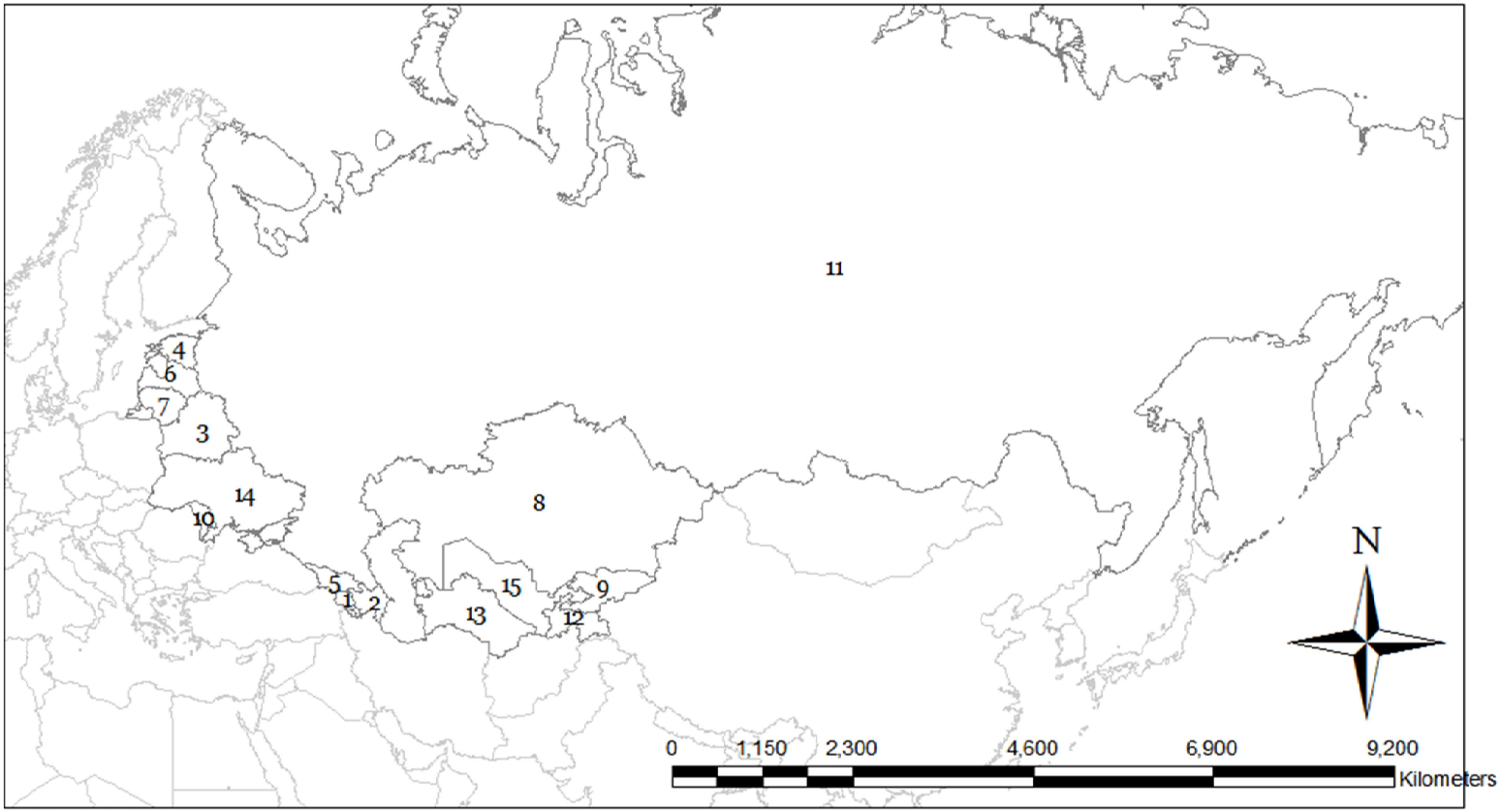
The department also introduced me to my closest friends in Chapel Hill. David Williard, Jonathan Hancock, and Julie Ault at various times helped make 109 Todd Street a home. Kimberly Kutz, Friederike Brühöfner, Nora Doyle, and the other women of 303 A Laurel Ave—a.k.a. Pemberley—offered up innumerable dinners, endless support, countless games of Settlers of Catan, not a few rounds of pool, and all the other little things that made it possible to persevere. Derek Holmgren and Sarah Lowry offered great food and better company. For many years, Mark Slagle made Wednesday night the best night of the week and, even when there were no nachos to win by dominating the pub quiz, always kept things in perspective. I must also thank Kathleen Conti, whose care in reading the early chapters of this dissertation was exceeded only by the friendship she offered. For putting up with me during the harried final days of writing this dissertation, Mary also deserves a large measure of gratitude. Over the years in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, friends too numerous to name have supported me in ways they may not have even known: I must simply thank them as a group.

Last, and most important, I would never have made it this far without my family. Mom and Dad always offered their support and love; Jessa Davis and Doug Davis did too. The years when I researched and wrote this dissertation saw many changes in the family: we bid farewell to Aunt Karen and welcomed my niece, Madilyn. As this dissertation neared completion, we said goodbye to my grandfather, Homer R. Dorrell, whose lifelong passion for growing and sharing food planted a seed that grew, however unexpectedly, into my interest in farming in the Soviet Union. It is to him, and to my family as a whole, that I dedicate this dissertation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

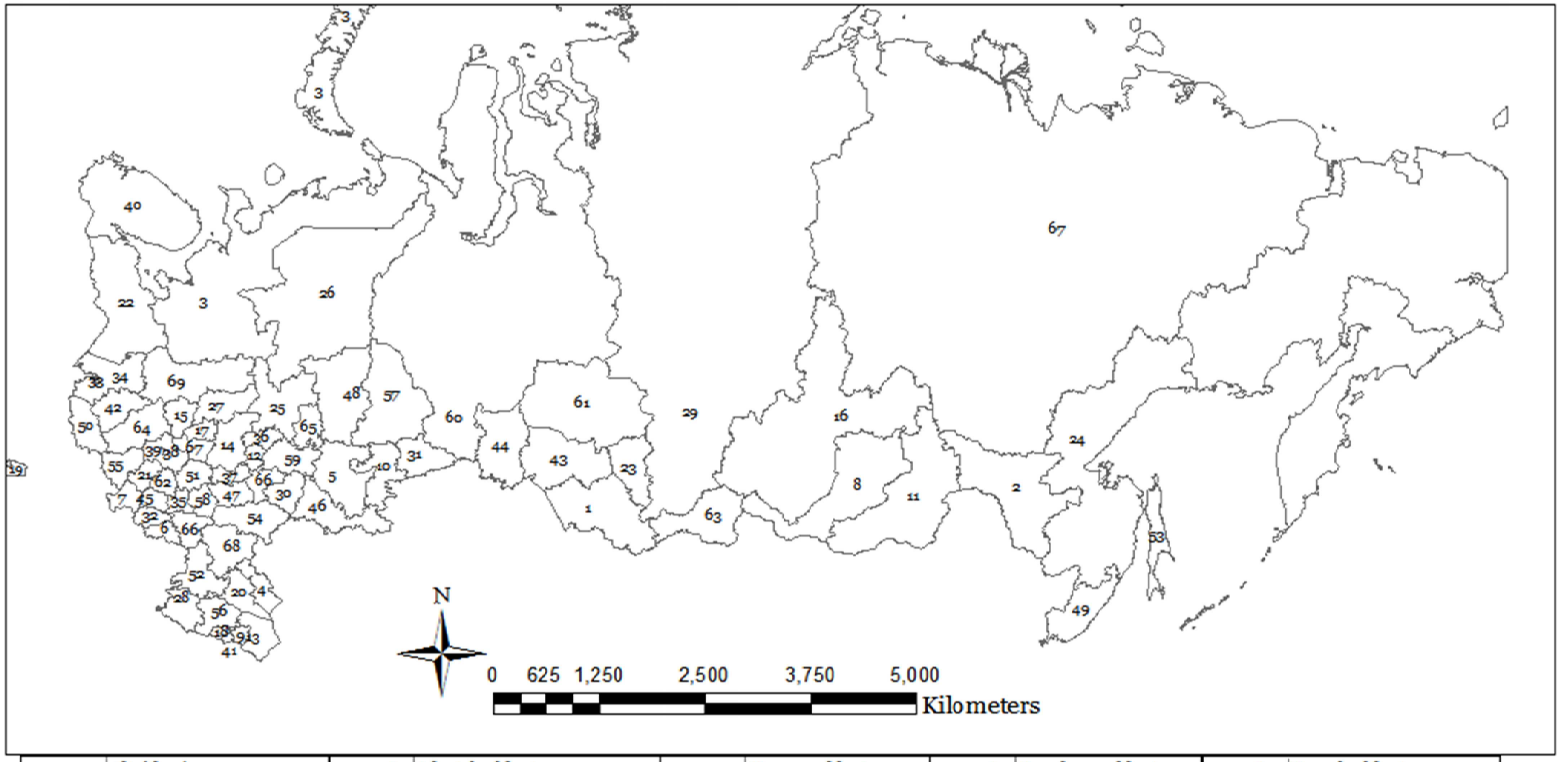
Union Republics of the USSR, 1962



1	Armenian SSR	6	Latvian SSR	11	RSFSR
2	Azerbaijan SSR	7	Lithuanian SSR	12	Tajik SSR
3	Belorussian SSR	8	Kazakh SSR	13	Turkmen SSR
4	Estonian SSR	9	Kyrgyz SSR	14	Ukrainian SSR
5	Georgian SSR	10	Moldavian SSR	15	Uzbek SSR

Map Data: ArcWorld, ESRI, 2012 and ArcWorld Supplement, ESRI, 2000, 2010.

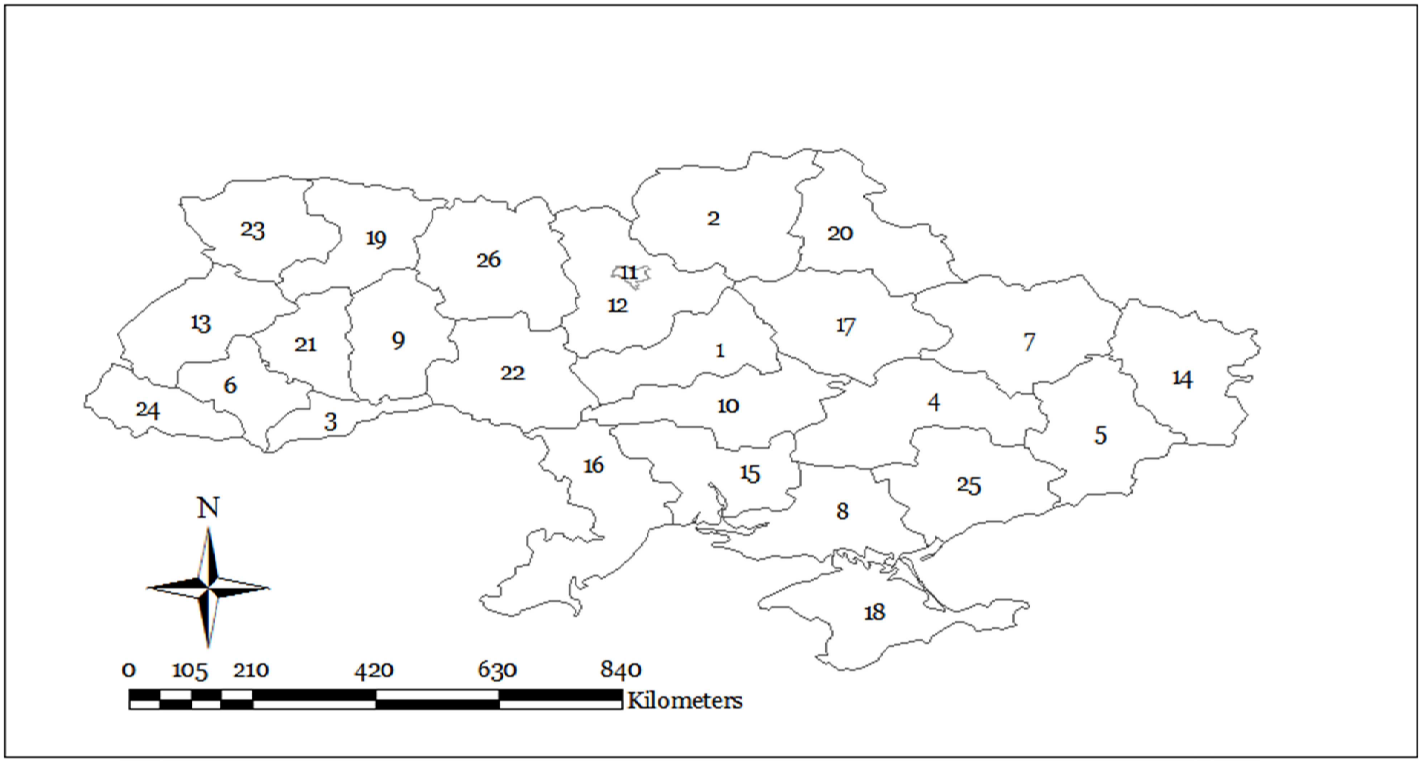
Administrative Regions of the RSFSR, 1962



1	Altai krai	16	Irkutsk oblast	31	Kurgan oblast	46	Orenburg oblast	61	Tomsk oblast
2	Amur oblast	17	Ivanovo oblast	32	Kursk oblast	47	Penza oblast	62	Tula oblast
3	Arkhangel oblast	18	Kabardino-Balkariia ASSR	33	Leningrad (city)	48	Perm oblast	63	Tuvan ASSR
4	Astrakhan oblast	19	Kaliningrad oblast	34	Leningrad oblast	49	Primor'e krai	64	Tver oblast
5	Bashkir ASSR	20	Kalmyk ASSR	35	Lipetsk oblast	50	Pskov oblast	65	Udmurt ASSR
6	Belgorod oblast	21	Kaluga oblast	36	Mari ASSR	51	Riazan oblast	66	Ul'ianovsk oblast
7	Briansk oblast	22	Karelian ASSR	37	Mordovia ASSR	52	Rostov oblast	67	Vladimir oblast
8	Buriat ASSR	23	Kemerovo oblast	38	Moscow (city)	53	Sakhalin oblast	68	Volgograd oblast
9	Checheno-Ingush ASSR	24	Khabarovsk krai	39	Moscow oblast	54	Saratov oblast	69	Vologda oblast
10	Cheliabinsk	25	Kirov oblast	40	Murmansk oblast	55	Smolensk oblast	66	Voronezh oblast
11	Chita oblast	26	Komi ASSR	41	North Ossetia ASSR	56	Stavropol krai	67	Yakutiia ASSR
12	Chuvash ASSR	27	Kostroma oblast	42	Novgorod oblast	57	Sverdlovsk oblast		
13	Dagestan ASSR	28	Krasnodar krai	43	Novosibirsk oblast	58	Tambov oblast		
14	Gor'kii oblast	29	Krasnoiarsk krai	44	Omsk oblast	59	Tatar ASSR		
15	Iaroslavl oblast	30	Kuibyshev oblast	45	Orel oblast	60	Tiumen oblast		

Map Data: ArcWorld Supplement, ESRI, 2000, 2012

Oblasts of Ukrainian SSR, 1962



1	Cherkas'k oblast	10	Kirovohrad oblast	19	Rivne oblast
2	Chernihiv oblast	11	Kyiv (city)	20	Sumy oblast
3	Chernivtsy oblast	12	Kyiv oblast	21	Ternopil oblast
4	Dnipropetrovs'k oblast	13	L'viv oblast	22	Vinnytsia oblast
5	Donetsk oblast	14	Luhan'sk oblast	23	Volyn oblast
6	Ivano-Frankivs'k oblast	15	Mykolaiv oblast	24	Zakarpatia oblast
7	Khar'kiv oblast	16	Odessa oblast	25	Zaporizhia oblast
8	Kherson oblast	17	Poltava oblast	26	Zhytomyr oblast
9	Khmel'nyts'k oblast	18	Crimea oblast		

Map Data: ArcWorld Supplement, ESRI, 2000, 2012

Vopros armianskomu radio: "Chto takoe kommunizm?"
Otvet: "Eto sovetskaia vlast' plius kukuruzifikatsiia vse strany."

Question to Armenian Radio: "What is communism?"
Answer: "It is Soviet power plus the corn-ification of the entire country."

—Khrushchev-era Soviet anecdote

INTRODUCTION

KHRUSHCHEV'S CORN CRUSADE, SOVIET INDUSTRIAL AGRICULTURE IN GLOBAL CONTEXT, AND POST-STALIN REFORM

During the decade Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev led the Soviet Union, he softened Joseph Stalin's repressive regime and raised citizens' living standards. Yet his historical legacy has been defined considerably by ridicule. For instance, a Russian nickname for him, *kukuruznik*, or "corn-man," captures his ardor for the crop he considered necessary to feed the livestock required to provide abundant dairy products and meat to the masses.[1] Disregarding the constraints the USSR's climate put on agriculture, Khrushchev never ceased cajoling farmers in every region of his vast country to plant corn, behavior that fueled endless jokes.[2] While ousting him in October 1964, his former comrades denounced his agricultural programs as "harebrained scheming."[3] They named corn the cause of the failure of the 1963 harvest, which had culminated in breadlines and grain purchases on the world market. Echoing this sentiment by using words such as "incoherent" and "contradictory," scholars have judged Khrushchev's agricultural reforms a quixotic quest for a "miracle."[4] Even William Taubman's sympathetic, Pulitzer Prize–

---

[1] Used today by those who remember the era, the moniker appeared in contemporary stories by foreign reporters. See, for example: Stephen S. Rosenfeld, "Corn, the Crop Khrushchev Pushed, Appears to Be Sharing His Disgrace: Butt of Soviet Jokes," *Washington Post* (December 14, 1964): A1. Here and throughout, corn refers to the plant known outside North America as maize and according to the scientific classification *Zea mays*.

[2] The joke on the preceding page appears in: Dora Shturman and Sergei Tiktin, *Sovetskii Soiuz v zerkale politicheskogo anekdota* (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1985), 200. To get it, the listener needed to recall V. I. Lenin's maxim that communism meant Soviet power plus the *electrification* of the entire country. This and all subsequent translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[3] Russian Sate Archive of Contemporary History [*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii*, or RGANI], f. 2, op. 1, d. 780, l. 105. Note on usage: I cite archival documents according to the internal subdivisions found in Russian archives. In order from largest to smallest, they are: *fond* (f.), or collection; *opis'* (op.), or inventory; *delo* (d.), or file; and *list* (l.), or page. I provide full names of archives at first mention, but subsequently use only the corresponding acronym.

[4] Historian Elena Zubkova writes, "The term 'Khrushchev's reforms' is . . . arbitrary. . . . Reform is a

winning biography of Khrushchev concludes that this "crusade" for corn "turned into an irrational obsession."[5] Fifty years later, Khrushchev's reputation as the public face of a nuclear-armed superpower with a rapidly growing economy has yielded to portrayals of his behavior as illogical buffoonery.[6] In a 2011 interview, Sergei Nikitich Khrushchev noted that many consider his father "a comic figure," contending that even historians misrepresent the elder Khrushchev's policies. They claim, for example, "that Khrushchev brought corn from America to plant it beyond the Arctic Circle." Defending his father's legacy, he continued, "Of course, this was not the case: father simply ascertained that . . . corn contained the maximum amount of feed, so he said, 'Let's adopt that.' Corn became a joke, but there were no corn rebellions like the potato rebellions in the time of Catherine [II]."[7]

Far from being farcical, Khrushchev's policies induced millions of Soviet citizens to plant, cultivate, and harvest tens of millions of hectares of corn on collective and state farms across the country. In 1953, corn plantings constituted 3.5 million hectares, or just 3.3 percent of the total of 106 million hectares sown. In 1955, Khrushchev used his command of the

---

program of consecutive actions directed toward changing existing political and economic structures or toward their complete replacement. It is difficult to view the actions of leaders in the Thaw period as coherent and systematic." Zubkova, "The Rivalry with Malenkov," in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Sergei N. Khrushchev, William Taubman and Abbott Gleason, trans. David Gehrenbeck, Eileen Kane, and Alla Bashenko (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 83–84. A participant in the period and historian, A. A. Nikonov judged the reforms positive but "contradictory." Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy: Agrarnaia nauka i politika Rossii (XVIII–XX vv.)* (Moscow: Entsiklopediia rossiiskikh dereven', 1995), 3. Agricultural historian I. E. Zelenin concluded, "The reform path of N. S. Khrushchev was winding, tortuous, and highly contradictory." Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva i sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (Moscow: Institut istorii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, 2001), 275. Dissident chroniclers Roy and Zhores Medvedev termed his efforts a search for a "miracle." Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev: The Years in Power*, trans. Andrew R. Durkin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 65.

[5] William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 373.

[6] For an American example, see: Peter Carlson, *K Blows Top: A Cold War Comic Interlude Starring Nikita Khrushchev, America's Most Unlikely Tourist* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009). In weighing Khrushchev's achievements, a popular modern Russian magazine concluded that he had "freed the prisoners, but planted corn." "On vypustil zekov, no posadil kukuruzu," *Argumenty i fakty* (March 26, 2008): 57. For another example, see: "Kak Khrushchev nishchim limuziny daril," *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (September 8, 2011): 3.

[7] Irina Mak, "Professor Sergei Khrushchev: Esli by ottsa ne sniali, v kontse 1960-kh v SSSR byla by rynochnaia ekonomika," *Izvestiia* (April 9, 2010): 17.

Communist Party and government to increase that figure fivefold, to 17.9 million hectares. Year after year, he gave speeches—a contemporary anthology of them fills eight dense volumes—and enacted policies in a campaign to reach 30 million hectares by 1960 and, eventually, to match the United States by devoting 30 percent of Soviet cropland to corn. Corn plantings peaked in 1962, officially reaching an astounding 37.2 million hectares.[8] That figure, at 17 percent of the total, fell short of Khrushchev's American benchmark only because Soviet farms in the same period had doubled their cropland, which now totaled 220 million hectares.

This corn crusade, although flawed, was neither as humorous nor as harebrained as Khrushchev's critics have claimed. Long recognizing that he dreamed of providing Soviet citizens a rich diet, scholars have overlooked the models that inspired him. Challenging the scholarly consensus on his agricultural reforms—and his broader reform program—I ask: What inspired him to imagine a project so vast and ambitious, and then to doggedly pursue it for over a decade? In answering, I find a heretofore-neglected logic explaining its purpose and potential. In short, Khrushchev was a "globally-informed high-modernist," by which I mean that he embraced corn as an integral part of adopting the industrial farming model that reshaped agriculture first in the US after World War II and then around the world. American yields of corn expanded threefold in the postwar decades on the strength of these technologies, producing vast grain surpluses and driving down consumer prices for meat and milk.[9] Productivity surged in countries with diverse social, economic, and climatic conditions as farmers applied similar methods. Larger grain harvests averted a potential food crisis stemming from the rising global population, which ballooned from 2.5 billion in 1950 to more than 7 billion in 2012.[10]

---

[8] Naum Jasny, *Khrushchev's Crop Policy* (Glasgow: Outram, 1965), 142. A hectare is a measurement of area equal to 10,000 square meters—a square with sides 100 meters long—or 2.47 acres.

[9] Arturo Warman, *Corn and Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance*, trans. Nancy L. Westrate (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 188.

[10] World population expanded from less than 2 billion in 1900 to reach 3 billion by 1960, and 3.7 billion in 1970. "World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, Population Estimates and Projections Section,

Khrushchev borrowed methods for growing corn from this industrial model, which offered a rationale for his agricultural reforms and dreams of an instant revolution in farm productivity. The success in other environments of the models he chose indicates that his reforms had the capacity to similarly transform Soviet farms, raising output and redeeming his pledges to improve citizens' diet. I term his efforts a "corn crusade" because they embodied his almost religious faith in the principle that humans can overturn traditional approaches to agriculture, using science and technology to master nature and wrestle immense fertility from the soil. Embracing these convictions from its founding, the USSR had applied industrial farming methods only in limited spheres under Stalin. Khrushchev implemented them widely, according to the principle that the potential of any technology developed under capitalism was greater still under socialism. The resulting agricultural capacity would make the USSR a modern, productive, and egalitarian society, offering a noncapitalist development model that the Third World's newly independent countries would rush to emulate.

Although industrial farming increased world harvests, Soviet farms realized its potential too slowly to save Khrushchev's political career and legacy. When ousting him in 1964, the political elite had to justify their move and minimize their complicity in the crop failures of 1963. They charged that the progress Khrushchev's reforms achieved between 1953 and 1958 had halted, as output had risen a paltry 7 percent cumulatively between 1958 and 1962.[11] Having maligned his policies, his former comrades nonetheless redoubled investment in industrial farming, suggesting that his ideas were not so "harebrained" after all. Recapitulating the arguments made by Khrushchev's opponents, scholars have blamed his agricultural program's poor showing on corn's unfamiliarity, as well as on the climatic limits considered obvious to everyone but Khrushchev, who disregarded corn's need for the warmth lacking in many locales

---

http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm.

[11] A. N. Artizov, et al. eds., *Nikita Khrushchev: Stenogrammy Plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2007), 259.

of the USSR.[12] Certain that these forces had caused the crop's failure, scholars have undervalued the program's potential, leaving largely unexamined how the corn crusade became practice.

I do not argue that Khrushchev succeeded; however, instead of taking the crusade's defeat at face value, I ask: *Why* did Khrushchev's endeavor fail? Without a doubt, climatic conditions and a shortage of specialized knowledge about the crop checked its potential, but these circumstances represented only two of many obstacles. What can the battles making up the corn crusade, as well as their outcomes, reveal about the how the USSR functioned during the decade of Khrushchev's reforms? How did Soviet farms put American technologies into practice? How did the rural social and labor crisis inherited from Stalin hinder this effort? How did the bureaucracies that Khrushchev ventured to reform demonstrate inertia, even opposition, in managing potentially useful policies and economic measures? By seeking answers to these questions, a history of the corn crusade highlights the particular flaws of the Soviet system, those preventing farms in the USSR from equaling the huge harvests of feed for livestock that nonsocialist counterparts abroad used to increase output of dairy products and meat in the postwar period. By examining these themes through a history of Khrushchev's corn crusade, I put agriculture, long neglected by scholars, at the center of attention and, thereby, contribute to the growing historiography on the era of post-Stalin reforms. Not only an agricultural program, Khrushchev's endeavor serves as a lens through which to view in a new light the USSR's political processes, administrative apparatus, rural society, food policy, foreign policy aims, and official ideology. Realizing the topic's potential to draw diverse fields together, this study of corn joins conversations about agricultural history, environmental history, political history, and Cold War history.

* * *

[12] See, for example: Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 108; and I. V. Rusinov, "Agrarnaia politika KPSS v 50-e–pervoi polovine 60-kh godov: Opyt i uroki," *Voprosy istorii KPSS* no. 9 (1988): 41.

Khrushchev's agricultural reforms belong alongside those he championed in governance, society, and cultural policy. When Stalin died in March 1953, the "collective leadership" consisting of his inner circle recognized the need for new policies and practices. Reaffirming their socialist principles, they introduced reforms designed to bring the USSR closer to its ideal of an egalitarian but tightly governed society, and an economy of modern, state-owned industries. Ending arbitrary violence and freeing prisoners from labor camps, they encouraged optimism, creativity, and intellectual inquiry—within established boundaries. Recognizing the period's reformist atmosphere, scholars have characterized it as "liberalization" and "the Thaw," a term drawn from Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg's eponymous and epochal novel.[13] One of several contenders to succeed Stalin, Khrushchev amassed power and authority over several years as he backed a more flexible foreign policy and, in 1956, gave his "Secret Speech" enumerating Stalin's crimes against the party to a closed meeting of delegates to the Twentieth Party Congress. Historians have recently highlighted continuities with the Stalin period and recognized that Khrushchev often rejected moderation; for instance, he renewed the assault on religion, dormant since the war.[14] Earlier scholars attributed the inconsistent and erratic appearance of his reformism to hidden struggles within the leadership, the fortunes of his authority, or his personal preferences. Using archival documents to investigate struggles with the legacy of the GULAG prison camps, as well as related official and popular fears of criminality, historian Miriam Dobson convincingly argues that Soviet leadership's "confidence" waxed and waned in response to changing conditions, a fluidity that explains the reforms'

---

[13] For more on "liberalization," see: Melanie Ilič, "Introduction," in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilič and Jeremy Smith. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 57 (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1–2; and Polly Jones, "Introduction: The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 23 (New York: Routledge, 2006), 12–13.

[14] Tatiana A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, ed. and trans. Edward E. Roslof (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 187.

apparent unpredictability.[15] New sources permit historians to reassess Khrushchev's reforms and reveal previously obscured patterns, suggesting that a similar reappraisal of his *agricultural* programs' motivations, principles, and mechanisms is needed.

As an agricultural initiative, Khrushchev's corn crusade shaped efforts to raise living standards by improving diets. The connection between crops and food unites agricultural history and food history: as essayist Wendell Berry put it, "Eating is an agricultural act."[16] Historian Deborah Fitzgerald warns against isolating farming as an economic or technical process while neglecting rural communities and the cultural meanings of the food they produce.[17] As scholars have reflected on agriculture's social, political, cultural, nutritional, economic, and environmental facets, these concerns have also entered public consciousness.[18] Consumers now demand organic, free-range, and fairly traded foods while making celebrities of advocates for those grown locally. Recent studies, furthermore, demonstrate that these issues are relevant to both contemporary Russia and its past.[19] A small scholarship stresses the agricultural side of the relationship.[20] From the Soviet state's revolutionary origins, it wrested

---

[15] Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 157–58.

[16] Wendell Berry, "The Pleasures of Eating," in *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2009), 227.

[17] Deborah Fitzgerald, "Eating and Remembering," *Agricultural History* 79, no. 4 (2005): 392–408. Historian Peter Coclanis similarly stresses how investigating scientific knowledge, economic forces, and cultural change can reveal "the material, physical, corporeal, *sensible* sides of agricultural history . . . that still have their place even in our increasingly discursive world." Coclanis, "Food Chains: The Burdens of the (Re)Past," *Agricultural History* 72, no. 4 (1998): 662.

[18] In academia, anthropologist Sidney Mintz's history of sugar has been a foundational study of societies through their commodities. See: Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).

[19] Alison K. Smith, *Recipes for Russia: Food and Nationhood under the Tsars* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Edward M. Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik: Anastas Mikoian and the Making of the *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*," *The Russian Review* 71, no. 1 (2012): 2–20; and Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Berg, 2003). On the postsocialist present, see: Nancy Ries, "Potato Ontology: Surviving Postsocialism in Russia," *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2009): 181–212.

[20] See, for example: Jenny Leigh Smith, "The Soviet Farm Complex: Industrial Agriculture in a Socialist Context, 1945–1965" (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006).

grain from the countryside to avert the urban food shortages that had discredited the tsarist regime. During the First Five-Year Plan, from 1928 to 1932, Stalin's collectivization squeezed wealth and labor from rural communities to finance industrialization, damaging or destroying peasant economies and cultures.[21] In the 1930s, industrial production surged even as farm output stagnated. Having suffered unprecedented devastation during World War II, the USSR rebuilt industry while recovery on farms lagged, leaving Stalin's successors a crisis of low yields and food scarcity.[22] Memories of wartime privation and the deadly postwar famine (1946–47) remained poignant.[23] Although the government formally abolished rationing at the end of 1947, the average citizen ate a diet adequate in calories, but short on fruits, vegetables, meat, and milk.[24]

Farming and food security furthermore had relevance to foreign policy because the Cold War was a competition not only for geopolitical influence, but also between socialist and capitalist systems vying to provide citizens avenues for consumption. As historian Vladislav Zubok has shown, Soviet leaders evaluated the world based on a "revolutionary-imperial paradigm," balancing traditional great-power politics with idealistic internationalism and efforts to encourage imitators abroad. Reshaping Stalin's hardheaded foreign policy, Khrushchev

---

[21] On these policies and their consequences, see: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[22] O. M. Verbitskaia's history of postwar rural communities covers this theme: Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo: Ot Stalina k Khrushchevu; Sredina 40-kh–nachalo 60-kh godov* (Moscow: "Nauka," 1992).

[23] See: Nicholas Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946–47 in Global and Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and V. F. Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946–1947 godov: Proiskhozhdenie i posledstviia* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, Institut rossiiskoi istorii, 1996).

[24] On diets, see: Nikolai M. Dronin and Edward G. Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia 1900–1990: The Interaction of Climate and Agricultural Policy and Their Effect on Food Problems* (New York: Central European University Press, 2005), 165. For more on the social history of rationing in the postwar years, see: Elena Iu. Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957*, trans. and ed. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), 52–55.

favored the revolutionary side without abandoning the imperial.[25] Concerns about food security at home paralleled the imperative to mount an offensive to win "hearts and minds" in the Third World by offering the path to a more just society and comfortable way of life. Considering a socialist triumph inevitable, Khrushchev touted Soviet efforts "to catch up with and overtake America" in per capita output of meat, milk, eggs, and other foods, a promise to his citizens of a better life and to foreign leaders of a template for swift economic development. Through the end of the 1950s, growth surged, lending feasibility to his pledges, which in 1961 culminated in the Third Party Program's vow to equal the US in per capita production by 1970, and achieve full communism by 1980.

Growing demand for food in an urbanizing society spurred Stalin's successors to fear that shortages might foment social unrest, which they hoped to preempt by enacting policies to stimulate farm output. When grievances about living conditions triggered crises in East Berlin in 1953, as well as in Poland and Hungary in 1956, Soviet leaders violently suppressed them.[26] During the 1950s, the Soviet economy grew and living standards rose, but less quickly than Khrushchev promised, and his apparently empty pledges prompted uprisings. By the early 1960s, his image became tarnished by slowing progress and by scandals such as "the Riazan affair," which brought to light the fraud pervasive in the oblast's heralded successes in meat production.[27] Consumers found smaller supplies in the shops than they had come to expect, inciting anger. Throughout the period, unrest sparked by shortages remained local, indicating

---

[25] Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 104.

[26] György Péteri, "Introduction: The Oblique Coordinate Systems of Modern Identity," in *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. György Péteri (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 8.

[27] Oblast and local officials had fraudulently inflated production. Khrushchev's ceaseless propaganda had peaked when the leaders of Riazan oblast in central Russia claimed to have fulfilled three times its annual norm for meat production in 1959, earning praise and awards. Much of that output turned out to have been coerced from peasants or even fictional. Officials bought retail goods and resold them as new production. Farms slaughtered their herds wholesale, including milk cows and calves, mortgaging future years' product to earn short-term acclaim. Farms, districts, and oblasts across the USSR resorted to similar tactics. For a brief summary, see: Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 94–101.

that the population adhered to Soviet ideals but also expected authorities to deliver the goods they pledged.[28] Historian Vladimir Kozlov argues that these "mass uprisings" signaled a "crisis of modernization" resulting from the struggles of state and society to adapt to post-Stalin circumstances.[29] The most infamous instance, the Novocherkassk rebellion of 1963, saw workers explode in anger at rising food prices, falling real wages, and empty promises of imminent abundance. The government repressed them in a hail of gunfire, killing many.[30]

Amid all of these domestic and international concerns, Khrushchev considered his corn crusade essential to revolutionizing farming in the shortest time at the lowest cost while maintaining the ideologically orthodox commitment to state and collective farms.[31] Considering the extremes of the USSR's climate merely a hurdle that the farms might clear by using proper techniques and crop varieties, he championed corn as a panacea ensuring that every region and farm contributed to his goals. Millions of collective farmers, state-farm workers, agronomists, administrators, party officials, and students labored to plant, cultivate, and harvest corn in every one of the USSR's constituent oblasts and republics, from the irrigated valleys of Central Asia, across the southern steppes to the rich black-earth belt, and far to the north.

Khrushchev did not choose corn at random; long before, the crop had arrived in the

---

[28] Historian Robert Hornsby explains how unrest among working-class citizens reflected dissatisfaction with material conditions, which they expressed by demanding that leaders supply the more comfortable standard of living they promised. Hornsby, *Protest, Reform, and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Similarly, historian Vladimir Kozlov shows that belief defined the late 1950s and early 1960s, in contrast to the succeeding period of relative quiescence under L. I. Brezhnev. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, trans. and ed. Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 314.

[29] Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR*, 11–12.

[30] For the most thorough investigation of the Novocherkassk events, see: Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[31] Differences in legal standing and production separated state and collective farms, although in practical terms the differences declined during the Khrushchev period. Generally, state farms employed capital-intensive methods because they enjoyed higher levels of investment, offering the potential for efficient production. They often failed to meet these goals, imposing burdens on the state budget to which they enjoyed access in ways that the nominally independent collective farms did not. Collective farms relied more heavily on manual labor and, prior to post-Stalin reforms, had few of the resources necessary to embark on capital investments in production, which the state expected them to make on their own.

territory that would become the Soviet Union through transnational networks. First, the Columbian Exchange spread corn far from its New World birthplace, making it a common food for peasants in regions such as northern Italy and sub-Saharan Africa.[32] It quickly reached the Mediterranean basin and spread via the Balkan Peninsula to modern-day Moldova, where yellow corn porridge—*mămăligă* in Romanian—served as a peasant staple. An alternate route through the Black Sea brought it to western Georgia, where it also became a regular part of the diet. In Ukraine, peasant farmers grew corn mostly in southern and western provinces.[33] Many Slavic languages in the region share a common root with the Russian word for the crop, *kukuruza*, the origins of which remain uncertain. It may have come from Turkish, Greek, or even Italian, but each source is consistent with the crop's arrival from the Mediterranean.[34]

Before the Khrushchev era, peasants grew large amounts of corn in only a few locales, and as a staple of their diet rather than as livestock feed. Cool, wet conditions in the north and hot, dry ones in the south and east discouraged planting it beyond Georgia and southwestern Ukraine. Peasants viewed it as a crop of last resort in years of crisis. Corn's life cycle did not fit well with traditional cropping patterns founded on winter grains such as wheat and barley, which peasants sowed in the fall to root, lay dormant in winter, and ripen the following summer. Only when harsh winters, heavy rains, or drought disrupted that strategy did peasants plant corn in late spring, allowing them to feed themselves because it became edible sooner than other grains. The state hesitatingly encouraged corngrowing in southern regions during the First Five-Year Plan, but the chaos of collectivization and famine cut short those efforts. The USSR did not incorporate the Moldavian SSR until World War II, and the other locales where it was common

---

[32] On this, see: Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: The Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, 30th anniv. ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); and James McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500–2000* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[33] An account of farmers' traditional uses for corn in what became the Soviet Union can be found in: L. V. Sazanova, *Istoriia rasprostraneniia kukuruzy v nashe strane* (Minsk: Urozhai, 1964). A less detailed English-language account can be found in: Warman, *Corn and Capitalism*, 108–9.

[34] Brian Cooper, "Russian *Kukuruza* and Cognates: A Possible New Etymology," *Slavonica* 4, no. 1 (1997): 46–64.

accounted for only a small percentage of cropland. Under Stalin, Soviet farms planted corn on *fewer* hectares than was economically feasible, and failed to adopt technologies making it more productive, which had emerged in the United States in the interwar years.[35]

Khrushchev championed the crop, for which he was first responsible while serving as party leader in Ukraine, because experts stressed its importance to industrial farming and to American farms' productivity. Before World War I, American farmers had depended on naturally rich soil and a welcoming climate to supply inexpensive meat and milk. Haltingly in the interwar period and then almost universally after World War II, they adopted new technologies that enabled unprecedented corn harvests. Annual output hovered around 75 million metric tons in the early twentieth century. Harvests then began to climb, surpassing 100 million tons in 1965 and reaching nearly 140 million tons in 1975, even though the number of hectares devoted to corn *fell* from 32 million in 1945 to 22 million in 1970. This change happened because yields increased more than threefold between 1945 and 1980.[36] Machines, chemicals, hybrids, and related technologies made American farmers leading producers of grain for the world market. Regardless, most corn left the farm only as the beef, pork, poultry, and milk Americans began to consume more frequently because surpluses drove down prices after World War II.[37] A similar process reshaped farming in Western Europe.[38] After a postwar agrarian crisis made France a net importer of food in 1950, its farmers boosted productivity by using new technologies and expanding plantings of a traditional feed crop, barley, by 348 percent, and those of relatively unfamiliar corn by 815 percent.[39] By the end of the decade, the

---

[35] Jasny, *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*, 140.

[36] Warman, *Corn and Capitalism*, 186–88. A metric ton, or 1,000 kilograms (or 2,200 pounds), is slightly more than the English ton (2,000 pounds). I have used the metric ton throughout.

[37] Ibid., 189–91.

[38] Julie Hessler also suggests that the USSR developed in a similar fashion, only more slowly. Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917–1953* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1.

[39] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 305.

country began to export butter, cheese, and other dairy products.[40]

Corn became the engine and symbol of industrial agriculture owing to a self-reinforcing process: engineers and agronomists found the crop responsive to industrial technologies and therefore concentrated their efforts on it. Anthropologist Arturo Warman argues that corn surpasses all other crops in its "full and complete incorporation into the industrial era and modern capitalism."[41] It responded to breeders' efforts to create hybrids, first in experiments around 1900 and then commercially in the 1920s and 1930s.[42] Diverse landraces—locally adapted varieties resulting from prescientific selection—provided breeders the genes needed to develop hybrids resistant to pests, drought, and extremes of growing season. These hybrids hungrily consumed the synthetic fertilizers integral to industrial farming, converting them into yields as much as 30 percent higher than traditional varieties. Using herbicides and insecticides, farmers engineer regimented fields where corn thrived, while machines for planting, cultivating, and harvesting it boosted labor productivity, making the crop cheaper to produce.

Existing interpretations of Khrushchev's corn crusade have neglected the link between corn and industrial farming, and his faith in both. The ties between his program and the inventive, prolific models he saw in the US and around the world provided, as the title of chapter 1 puts it, "the logic of corn." Interest in industrial approaches to farming emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, soon after their invention in the US, and formed part of the Bolshevik admiration of America as the most modern and productive capitalist economy.[43] This "industrial

---

[40] This process replaced large landed estates, which had emerged in the late nineteenth century, with industrial farms, heralds of the "thirty glorious years" of postwar prosperity. For a history of this change, see: Chaia Heller, *Food, Farms, and Solidarity: French Farmers Challenge Industrial Agriculture and Genetically Modified Crops* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 42–43.

[41] Warman, *Corn and Capitalism*, 26.

[42] For more, see: Deborah K. Fitzgerald, *The Business of Breeding: Hybrid Corn in Illinois, 1890–1940* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[43] See, among the many works on this topic: Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Alan M. Ball, *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

ideal" introduced features of "the modern mass production factory and industrial board room" first into organizing farms on the Great Plains in the US, and then, at the end of the 1920s, gigantic state farms in the USSR.[44] Ingrained in the industrial ideal, a "transfer mentality" emboldened Soviet authorities to apply American farming technologies in the USSR.[45] This matched their belief that technology was "value-neutral," meaning technologies borrowed from capitalism offered greater advantage because socialism would mitigate any negative consequences arising from their capitalist origins.[46] Intense contacts continued through the First Five-Year Plan, but soon declined at Stalin's orders. At the end of the 1940s, he broke them almost entirely during the most intense phase of Cold War hostility and antiforeign frenzy. Hoping to put industrial technologies to work on Soviet farms, Khrushchev reopened dialogue in 1955 by sending the first Cold War era delegation of agricultural experts to visit farms, factories, and colleges in the US.[47] He worked with individuals around the world who shared his vision, including American businessman Roswell Garst. When considered in the context of world trends in agricultural technology, Khrushchev's reforms appear less outlandish and far more sensible: they were part and parcel of a concerted effort to realize Soviet ambitions to remake society and its interactions with nature.

By casting Khrushchev's industrial farming dreams as part of the USSR's interaction with the world, I suggest that the USSR also shaped its global context by seeking to influence the Third World in ways that established scholarly conceptions of the Cold War have missed. An

---

[44] I draw my definition of industrial agriculture from Deborah Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 3

[45] Ibid., 187.

[46] Historian of technology Paul Josephson routinely employs the term "value-neutral" in this way. Paul R. Josephson, *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth? Technological Utopianism under Socialism, 1917–1989* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

[47] Chapter 1 analyzes reports the delegation made in writing and in person to the Central Committee Presidium. The latter are located in RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107. The former are held in the collection for the USSR Ministry of Agriculture, f. 7486, in the Russian State Archive of the Economy [*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki*, RGAE].

edited volume on American modernization plans invites historians to reconceive the Cold War as a complex interaction including ideology and technology exchange among the superpowers, their blocs of allies, and Third World nations.[48] Examining American development initiatives in this light, scholars have left Soviet alternatives in the background and undervalued their influence.[49] By melding modern farming and irrigation technologies with Soviet ideology's anticapitalist tenets, Khrushchev hoped to create a ready-for-export alternative.[50] American development projects blossomed in the postwar decades, although they became known as the "Green Revolution" only in the late 1960s. Historian Nick Cullather has shown that officials in the American government and in nongovernmental organizations considered them countermeasures against communist-inspired reforms or insurrections. In fact, the official in the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) who coined the term "Green Revolution" explicitly contrasted that transformation with the "red" ones simmering in many corners of the Third World. Philanthropic agencies such as the Rockefeller Foundation wanted food power to preserve peace *and* American influence.[51] Their leaders imagined that

---

[48] Michael E. Latham, "Introduction: Modernization, International History, and the Cold War World," in *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War*, ed. David C. Engerman, et al. (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 3.

[49] In a more recent article, Engerman encourages Soviet historians to remedy neglect of Soviet engagement in the Third World. David C. Engerman, "The Second World's Third World," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 1 (2011): 183–211. Surveying the scholarship on the relationship between "East" and "South," Engerman notes that, in spite of scholars' prior attentiveness to such relationships they have neglected them in the years since the USSR's dissolution and the opening of archives. A recent example, Sergey Mazov's history of Soviet engagement in West Africa concentrates on ideology, diplomacy, and geopolitics rather than development. Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956–1964* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

[50] Highlighting socialist industrialization and ascribing social problems to capitalism, Soviet narratives of development tried to expand the USSR's influence to newly independent states of the Third World. This illustrates the universalist aspects of Zubok's "revolutionary-imperial paradigm." Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 94. Having long viewed the Third World as a front in the Cold War, scholars have mostly concentrated on military conflicts. Both the USSR and the US, made appeals on behalf of their respective models for the "hearts and minds" of leaders and peoples, as their ideologies drove each side to seek "imitators" beyond their geographically defined spheres of influence. Engerman, "Second World's Third World," 189–90.

[51] Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 7–8.

overpopulation and food shortage led to political instability, and the latter to rebellions that put American power at risk.[52] This fear drove them to spread new crop varieties, irrigation systems, fertilizers, and other technologies rooted in modern farming. Although successful in increasing output, these technologies harmed many farmers by favoring those positioned to acquire fertilizers and hybrids, while pushing smaller subsistence producers further to the margins, or off their land entirely. The USSR loomed as a threat to this model of rural development because a socialist alternative, offering an equally modern template for agrarian development, pressured American advocates to acknowledge the dangers of rural poverty and inequality. Nonetheless, the Soviet alternative has remained an implicit but largely unexamined presence in histories of development and the Green Revolution.[53] Therefore, I highlight the USSR's connections to world trends in agriculture, taking a step toward a fuller analysis of Soviet counterparts to American development efforts in the Third World.[54]

Considering the USSR a part—if an atypical one—of a global modernity, scholars have highlighted transnational links between Soviet developments and nonsocialist counterparts in consumerist values, media, culture, and technology.[55] I further develop this connection by turning the spotlight on agriculture. To buttress the case that Khrushchev devoted the USSR to global trends in farming, I draw on conceptual frameworks interpreting the Soviet system as a

---

[52] John H. Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution: Wheat, Genes, and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 119. Perkins also shows how officials and researchers considered breeding plants part of a battle between capitalist and communist ideals.

[53] For instance, Perkins frames the entire process of breeding high-yielding varieties of wheat as part of the Cold War contest, and gives almost no attention to the USSR itself. A vast scholarship debates the positive and negative effects of the Green Revolution's social, economic, political, and environmental transformations, but the USSR rarely merits mention.

[54] Notably, one of the few Cold War era scholarly works devoted to corn in the USSR, a geography dissertation, examined Khrushchev's corn program as an example of development policies in the context of a "totalitarian" and nonmarket system. It considered his efforts significant because success in corn cultivation might boost the USSR's case as a development model. Jeremy H. Anderson, "The Soviet Corn Program: A Study in Crop Geography" (PhD diss., University of Washington, Seattle, 1964).

[55] For example, see: Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

commitment to building a socialist society with recognizable features drawn from a common modernity. Long neglected, the basis for considering the USSR in pan-European and world contexts has deep roots in the Soviet studies tradition, beginning with the Harvard Interview Project.[56] In 1949 and 1950, scholars interviewed wartime expatriates who remained in Western Europe and the US, using responses to construct a model of the system consisting of three elements.[57] First, the state possessed ambitions of totalitarian control over political, social, and cultural life. Second, components of society specific to the Soviet system hindered those aspirations.[58] Third, the USSR had features in common with any "industrial society," making it comparable to urban, economically advanced countries in Western Europe, North America, and beyond.[59] The Harvard Project thus rejected the commonplace notion that the USSR stood apart, comparable only to Nazi Germany in its ruling party's supposedly totalitarian grip on society. In addition to an industrial economy and urban population, the USSR adopted industrial farming, with attendant effects on how farms produced food and citizens consumed it.

Khrushchev's enthusiasm for industrial agriculture's capacity to transform relationships with the environment demonstrated Soviet ideology's embrace of a common modernist

---

[56] Mark Edele, "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 2 (2007), 353.

[57] This scheme can be found in: Raymond Bauer and Alex Inkeles, *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); and Raymond Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, *How the Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

[58] Edele concludes that debates of the 1970s and 1980s between the proponents of totalitarian interpretations privileging high politics and the social historians who focused on Soviet society reached such vehemence because each side analyzed a different face of the system. Edele, "Soviet Society, Social Structure" 354.

[59] Post-Soviet scholarship on everyday life has renewed consideration of those features, including material culture, family, and everyday activities. Regarding the Stalin period, see: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times; Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Jeffrey W. Jones, *Everyday Life and the "Reconstruction" of Soviet Russia during and after the Great Patriotic War, 1943–1948*, The Allan K. Wildman Group Historical Series, no. 3 (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2008). A list, hardly exhaustive, of scholars examining the postwar and post-Stalin periods includes: David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (New York: Berg, 2000); and Juliane Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

understanding of nature as separate from society, an object for humans to master and bend to their purposes. Environmental historians, by contrast, emphasize societies' integration into the environment, which is not merely the surrounding natural world, but a whole that includes both.[60] The Soviet "promethean" vision held that humans could use science and technology to control nature.[61] This dream perhaps reached its height in the "Stalinist Plan for the Transformation of Nature," an unrealized scheme of irrigation canals, thousand-kilometer-long tree belts sheltering fields from wind erosion, land reclamation projects, and other measures designed to direct natural forces and increase economic output.[62] These visions also influenced farming. Before collectivization, cultural preferences and climate shaped how peasants selected crops, managed farms, and interacted with natural forces. Soviet leaders' formal control over the collective and state farms gave them license to alter these choices. Khrushchev used this power to agitate for planting corn outside its previous range, presuming that the crop could prove productive even in northern climates if harvested at less mature stages for use as livestock feed, rather than as fully mature grain for human consumption.

These concepts further demonstrate the common ground the USSR shared with other twentieth-century modernizing states, as emphasized by historian Adeeb Khalid and by anthropologist James C. Scott. Khalid has characterized the USSR as an "activist, interventionist, mobilizational" state "leading [its] population on a forced march to progress and development."[63] Instead of an anomaly, the USSR's ambitions compared to those of other states

---

[60] Environmental historian William Cronon has particularly influenced my thinking on this point. See: *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

[61] Douglas R. Weiner, for instance, employs the term "prometheanism" in his examination of Soviet attitudes toward nature and preservation. Weiner, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation, and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 2.

[62] For more on the plan, see: Paul R. Josephson, et al., *An Environmental History of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 119.

[63] Adeeb Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective," *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006): 244.

founded in the aftermath of World War I, especially the Republic of Turkey.[64] Khalid's account of the USSR's Central Asian territories considers only briefly the environment and agriculture in the form of cotton production.[65] Calling the USSR the quintessential case of "authoritarian high-modernism," Scott explains the concept by developing a metaphor drawn from human interactions with the environment: he likens efforts to govern a society to a farmer's control over a field. Intermixing many complementary crops, a field organized according to the principles of polyculture is too complex for a distant bureaucrat to understand or manage. By simplifying the field into regimented rows of genetically identical hybrids of a single crop, industrial farming creates a uniform environment, allowing vital characteristics to be quantified in a few measurements describing the field's size, the hybrid planted there, the soil's fertility, and the crop's yield. Equating the field to society, Scott illustrates high-modernist states' ambition to know everything about the societies they govern and, therefore, more easily extract labor, taxes, and goods. To do so, states reduce societies to regular, quantifiable facsimiles—resembling the industrial field—bearing little relation to existing adaptive communities, akin to the complex polyculture garden. Not all high modernist projects of the twentieth century were destructive; however, the USSR was an "extreme but diagnostic case of authoritarian high-modernist planning" because World War I and the Civil War left peasant societies prostrate, unprepared to withstand the coercive standardization that culminated in collectivization. Scott contends that this placed peasants' activities and the environment alike under the state's dominance.[66] In practice, collective farms fell far short of any such ideal. Although subject to the dictates of

---

[64] Ibid., 232. Considering Soviet efforts to sculpt citizens and cultures in the interwar period, he places them alongside those of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Turkey, which also emerged from the ashes of World War I. Historian Peter Holquist argues that practices developed by belligerents during World War I to manage people, production, and information defined the nascent Soviet state's foundations, whereas Germany, France, Britain, and other societies reverted—at least temporarily—to prewar norms. Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[65] Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization," 232 n. 3.

[66] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 201.

bureaucrats in Moscow, collective farmers carried out those directives with little enthusiasm. Collectivization did not radically restructure crop rotations because authorities cared mostly for extracting food and labor to finance industrialization and feed workers. Khrushchev ambitiously attempted to change practices in hopes of realizing a vision of industrial farming inherent, yet latent, in the Soviet concept of modern agriculture.

Scott concludes that high-modernist schemes, from relatively benign forms such as the planned city to humanitarian disasters such as the collective farm, failed because they dismissed *mētis*: the local, adaptable, practical knowledge suppressed in attempts to tame untamable social and environmental realities.[67] The concept of *mētis* suggests that Moscow's policies did not accommodate adaptive practices resulting from long experience with local conditions; environmental, social, and cultural forces impeded efforts to realize the potential of corn and of industrial farming. High modernism and *mētis* together frame an examination of how interactions among policies, people, and the environment evolved under Khrushchev.

A history of the corn crusade must therefore consider Khrushchev as a product of modernism and the Soviet project. A "globally-informed high-modernist," Khrushchev earned a practical education under Soviet power that ingrained into him and his compatriots these ideological preferences, themselves hardwired into the Stalinist system. That worldview predisposed Khrushchev to see the potential in corn as a part of an industrial farming complex, pushing him to expend enormous effort to implement principles shared with other twentieth-century modernizing states. His scheme faced challenges from local conditions and Soviet practices that limited harvests, but in this light the corn crusade no longer appears "irrational," "contradictory," or "harebrained." To repeat: I neither argue that Khrushchev succeeded, nor wish to rehabilitate his vision of corn-based industrial agriculture. Even if his policies had increased farm output in the short term and matched the results achieved in the US, the pressing economic and ecological consequences of industrial farming we face today demonstrate

[67] Ibid., 309–11.

that apparent postwar successes only postponed addressing industrial farming's social, cultural, economic, and environmental repercussions.[68] I do contend, however, that simply dismissing Khrushchev's vision ignores a subject ripe for deeper analysis, and one that reveals much about the Soviet experiment in principle and in practice.

* * *

As a case study of the constraints on reform, Khrushchev's corn crusade offers answers to questions about policy-making, governance, and labor. Tapping long inaccessible archival documents and a variety of published sources, I explore the complex reality of the corn crusade in practice to discover why Soviet farms fell short of nonsocialist benchmarks in the US, Western Europe, and even the Third World.[69] The following section positions my dissertation in the scholarship on Khrushchev's reforms and outlines the structure of the chapters.

Khrushchev made agricultural reforms part of the political struggle that won him the

---

[68] As Scott explains, high-modernist schemes provoked criticism. The architect and visionary of the planned city Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris) inspired sociologist Jane Jacobs to praise the beauty and functionality of a mixed, organic urban community. Ibid., 132–46. Similarly, Lenin's vision of the vanguard party and the centralized modernizing state spurred Rosa Luxemburg and Alexandra Kollontai to challenge him. Ibid., 168–79. Opponents of industrial agriculture have denounced the ecological, social, and cultural costs that standard economic analyses ignore. Several of them have particularly influenced my approach. Deborah Fitzgerald's skepticism toward her subject is evident in her work. Journalist Michael Pollan has brought the problems of modern industrial agriculture based on corn monoculture to popular attention. Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006). Additionally, farmer, poet, essayist, and activist Wendell Berry often denounces the harm industrial farming brings to the environment, societies, and cultures. See: Berry, *Citizenship Papers: Essays* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2004); and Berry, *Bringing It to the Table*.

[69] In chapters 2 through 4, I draw on archives of top Communist Party organizations, especially the Central Committee's departments (RGANI, f. 5). These include the general department (op. 30) that coordinated with the others and with regional committees. In the Khrushchev period, separate departments for party organizations communicated with regions in the RSFSR (op. 32) and the fourteen remaining union republics (op. 31). A similar structure existed for the agriculture departments (*op*. 46 and *op*. 45, respectively). The records of many central Soviet and RSFSR government organizations are housed in the State Archive of the Russian Federation [*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi Federatsii*, GARF]. The documents of the USSR Council of Ministers (f. R-5446) provide insight into the formation of individual directives. By contrast, the RSFSR Council of Ministers (f. A-259) tended to fulfill executive functions. The ministries of agriculture for both the USSR and the RSFSR similarly coordinated and executed policy. GARF f. A-310 houses the records of the RSFSR Ministry of Agriculture, while the USSR ministry's files are in the RGAE (f. 7486). In addition, the records for several organizations responsible for inspection and oversight are housed in GARF, including the USSR Ministry for State Control (f. R-8300) and its RSFSR subordinate (f. A-340).

authority to dictate policy and launch his crusade. Stalin's successors divided responsibilities and began to vie for position even as the old tyrant lay dying.[70] Khrushchev took up leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, comprised of between 200 and 300 top party and government officials; however, he initially appeared subordinate to the heads of the government, L. P. Beria, G. M. Malenkov, and V. M. Molotov. Proving a master of intrigue, Khrushchev first built a coalition to overthrow Beria, whom the others feared for his control over the secret police. Becoming formal head of the party, Khrushchev gained authority to appoint its regional leaders, pack the Central Committee with loyalists, and reassert its authority, which Stalin had allowed to diminish. In 1954, Khrushchev initiated the "Virgin Lands campaign," a bold agricultural program to plant wheat on millions of hectares of sparsely populated land in Kazakhstan and Siberia, as well as to cultivate unused lands across the USSR. That year, he quietly encouraged experiments in corngrowing far beyond the crop's traditional range, extending no further north than Kyiv. In January 1955, he launched an all-out offensive on a front spanning millions of hectares. His aggressive and visionary measures helped persuade colleagues of his abilities, gaining him support against more cautious rivals such as Malenkov, whom he demoted from premier to deputy premier in early 1955.

In June 1957, rivals fearful of Khrushchev's growing power built a majority in the Presidium—as the highest party executive more commonly called the Politburo was known between 1952 and 1966—in favor of ousting him. Long disregarded party rules required the Central Committee to ratify the decision, but Khrushchev's control over appointments gave him a majority there, allowing him to keep power and replace Presidium opponents remaining from Stalin's entourage with his own supporters. This loosened remaining restraints on pursuit of his vision. Corn remained top priority as he overrode local authorities' suspicion, as well as concerns about the crop's unfamiliarity, the unfavorable climate, and unpredictable weather. He

[70] This narrative of political struggle appears in much of the secondary literature. For the clearest and most compelling iteration, see: Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 236–57.

badgered local leaders to expand cropland, plant more corn, and bring in larger harvests. When they fell short of his goals, he blamed them and goaded them to redouble their efforts. Giving a speech in August 1958, for instance, he hoped to shame the officials gathered in the Russian city of Smolensk by dragging a three-meter-tall stalk of corn onto the stage. Claiming it had grown on a farm in neighboring Moscow oblast, a locale with an equally cool and wet climate, he taunted, "You have no corn like this on any collective farm."[71]

In pursuit of larger harvests, Khrushchev proselytized machines, hybrid seeds, synthetic fertilizers, and other technologies. In 1959, after five years of reform, Soviet farms appeared to have made progress: output had risen and forecasts promised further advances, raising optimism. Even his ambitious boast that the Soviet Union would soon "catch up with and overtake America" in per capita output of food seemed possible. The Soviet economy grew faster than those of its capitalist rivals. Soviet engineers had designed powerful rockets and launched the world's first artificial satellite, Sputnik, in 1957. The Soviet "Scientific-Technical Revolution" transformed the economy: if tractors and hydroelectric dams had been the state of the art in the 1930s, by the 1960s satellites and nuclear-power stations had supplanted them.[72] Increasing international prestige forced others to recognize the USSR's geopolitical strength. Rapprochement with the United States began in 1955 with the Soviet doctrines of "peaceful coexistence" and "peaceful competition" in economic and technical arenas, and reached a high point when in 1959 Khrushchev visited America—and Roswell Garst's farm in Iowa.

Subsequent years cast a shadow over Khrushchev's victories and his corn crusade. Publicized successes proved fictional, and revelations of widespread fraud harmed his

---

[71] N. S. Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1962), 272.

[72] The idealism and enthusiasm for science characteristic of the period appears prominently in the account of Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis. Vail' and Genis, *Shestidesiatye: Mir sovetskogo cheloveka* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988), 84–85. For more on the Scientific-Technological Revolution as part of the Cold War competition, see: Susan E. Reid, "The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 290–91.

legitimacy. In response, he moved breathlessly from one new measure to the next. The phrase "corn, Cuba, and China" encapsulates the troubles encircling him.[73] Khrushchev seemingly backed down in October 1962 in the face of American threats during the Cuban Missile Crisis he created, harming his reputation for hardnosed negotiating with foreign powers. The increasingly public split between the USSR and the People's Republic of China harmed his credibility in relations with socialist allies. Corn became emblematic of agricultural struggles and accompanying food shortages. After early extensive growth—securing larger harvests by planting more hectares—farms proved unable or unwilling to use chemicals, fertilizers, and hybrids to increase productivity per hectare. Grain reserves declined as demand outstripped supply. When crop failure struck in 1963, the USSR had to import wheat and limit consumption, a humiliating contrast to Khrushchev's claims that abundance was on the horizon. Repeatedly reorganizing party and government bureaucracies, he alienated that power base. When those surrounding Khrushchev collaborated to remove him in October 1964, no one supported the man who had nurtured de-Stalinization and promised communism by 1980.

This dissertation builds on post-Soviet histories of politics and reform under Khrushchev, which itself rests on earlier scholarship. In the 1970s, revisionist political scientists privileging the leader's authority, or ability to get things done, challenged "totalitarian" interpretations and the "conflict model" of Soviet politics, both of which concentrated on power, or the leader's security in a formal position.[74] Considering policy-making a process in which

---

[73] Scholars have explained Khrushchev's political demise this way since the 1970s, beginning with the work of dissident historians Roy and Zhores Medvedev. See: Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*.

[74] "Revisionist" scholars recognized that the USSR under Khrushchev functioned differently than it had under Stalin, exhibiting fewer totalitarian characteristics. For examples of that earliest paradigm, see: Abraham Brumberg, ed., *Russia under Khrushchev: An Anthology from* Problems of Communism (New York: Praeger, 1962). In the early 1960s, the "conflict school" advanced the view that Kremlin politics were inherently unstable. They underscored the limits on Khrushchev's power, concluding that struggle continued after he had secured power in June 1957. These scholars used the tested tools of "Kremlinology," seeking evidence in public statements, the order in which leaders' names appeared in official announcements, and even their positions in photographs, and conjectured that factional fighting explained every policy initiative, subtle shift, or tactical retreat. For an example of this, see: Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership, 1957–1964* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966). For a critique of this mode of analysis, see: Jerry F. Hough, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*

disagreements never emerged into open conflict, the revisionists argued that Khrushchev tried to "build consensus" among representatives of various constituencies, gathering a coalition of "friends of change" large enough to silence its "foes."[75] Drawing on archives closed before 1991, historians have reexamined his reforms. Historian Miriam Dobson has argued that policy shifts reflected the leadership's collective response to circumstances that swayed their mentality, rather than a realignment of separate interest-group coalitions favoring or opposing the status quo. Khrushchev and other leaders backed reform to address Stalin's legacy, but they also feared instability. When unease about the pace or direction of change grew, their "confidence" fell and they halted or even reversed earlier initiatives.[76] Other scholars have examined interpersonal relationships within the leadership, finding friendships and rivalries after June 1957, but no evidence of organized factions around individuals, or around conservative and reformist positions.[77]

Although scholars have long written about Khrushchev-era agriculture policy, they have written around corn, only rarely addressing it directly. Contemporary western observers concluded that Khrushchev, no matter how innovative his approach, could not succeed so long as he left collective farms and nonmarket state procurements in place; moreover, climatic limitations, equipment shortages, and other concerns made this corn crusade "a precarious affair."[78] In the only work dedicated to corn, geographer Jeremy Anderson's dissertation examined official statistics tracing the program, considering it part of a Soviet modernization in

---

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 232–33.

[75] George W. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1982); and Stephen F. Cohen, "The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union," *Slavic Review* 38, no. 2 (1979): 187–202.

[76] Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 157–58.

[77] A. V. Sushkov, *Prezidium TsK KPSS v 1957–1964 gg.: Lichnost' i vlast'* (Ekaterinburg: Ural'skii tsentr akademicheskogo obsluzhivaniia, 2009).

[78] Lazar Volin, "Khrushchev's Economic Neo-Stalinism," *American Slavic and East European Review* 14, no. 4 (1955): 461. Jasny similarly emphasized limits on the potential of corn in the Soviet Union, devoting a substantial part of his book to the subject: Jasny, *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*, 140–86.

agriculture.[79] Scholars of the conflict school studied agricultural initiatives only as a lens to bring the power struggle into focus, paying little attention to how policies worked in practice.[80] Published in 1976, Martin McCauley's study of the Virgin Lands campaign took a step toward an analysis of policy implementation.[81] Dissident historians Roy and Zhores Medvedev considered corn one of Khrushchev's overambitious reforms, which after some initial success fell into disrepute.[82] Since the opening of the archives, scholars have considered the corn crusade as a part of the political history of Khrushchev's agricultural reforms, and of the social history of the postwar countryside.[83] Despite the evident potential of a thoroughgoing history of Khrushchev's corn offensive, no historian has yet seized the opportunities granted by access to the Soviet archives and by the growing scholarship on the period of post-Stalin reform.

Putting agriculture back at the center of scholarly discussion, a study of the corn crusade highlights links between policy and practices, a mission integral to what historian Sheila Fitzpatrick calls "the new political history."[84] This approach envisions a complex political process in the tradition of revisionists such as Breslauer, Cohen, and Hough. Conventions beginning with the totalitarian school considered ideology most important in driving politics, while later scholars privileged practical, even pragmatic motivations. Fitzpatrick argues that the new political history should balance the two;[85] as historian Peter Holquist puts it, ideology and

---

[79] Anderson, "Soviet Corn Program." See also: Jeremy H. Anderson, "A Historical-Geographical Perspective on Khrushchev's Corn Program," in *Soviet and East European Agriculture*, ed. Jerzy F. Karcz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 104–28.

[80] See, for example: Werner G. Hahn, *The Politics of Soviet Agriculture, 1960–1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); and Sidney I. Ploss, *Conflict and Decision-Making in Soviet Russia: A Case Study of Agricultural Policy, 1953–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965).

[81] Martin McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture: The Virgin Land Programme, 1953–1964* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976).

[82] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 65 and 125.

[83] Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*; Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 32.

[84] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Politics as Practice: Thoughts on the New Political History," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 1 (2004): 27–54.

[85] Ibid., 35–36

practice are "symbiotic."[86]

Cultural history also informs this new approach to politics. As historian Laura Engelstein argues, scholars subscribing to the totalitarian interpretation considered culture only an instrument of politics, subordinate to ideology. In the 1970s, under the social sciences' influence, scholars saw culture as a reflection of underlying social and power relations. Since then, historians have reinvigorated the study of culture, which Engelstein defines as a stable yet historical "system of values, signs, and conventions" permitting members of a society to understand collective and individual experiences.[87] Considering language, subtexts, contexts, and intended audiences, I read sources for silences and unspoken assumptions. These shed light on the goals, ideals, values, and worldviews of actors responding to Khrushchev's corn crusade with support or resistance. A history of his initiative therefore ties together elements of Soviet politics, governance, and society, with a concentration on attitudes and motivations of local officials and collective farmers. As Engelstein notes, the "habits of mind" (a term used by social historian Moshe Lewin) of these groups have received comparatively little investigation, especially as they evolved in the post-Stalin period.[88]

In view of the new political history, politics was a multidirectional process that included regional and local authorities. Scholars concentrating on the flow of policy directives from the top downward have rightly considered Khrushchev's authority to determine agricultural policy dominant. Agricultural historian I. E. Zelenin, for instance, has argued that the leader's agricultural policies demonstrated "the establishment of his personal dictatorship" over agriculture, especially between June 1957 and October 1964.[89] In practice, a complex set of

---

[86] Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution*, 6.

[87] Laura Engelstein, "Culture, Culture Everywhere: Interpretations of Modern Russia, across the 1991 Divide," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 2 (2001): 363.

[88] See, for example: Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

[89] Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 4.

interactions extending far beyond the power struggles among top leaders in Moscow weakened Khrushchev's authority.[90] With these considerations in mind, this dissertation's later chapters draw on documents in regional archives to scrutinize relations between the center and subordinates on the periphery. Historian Donald J. Raleigh notes that local studies potentially "enrich or complicate our understanding of major events and turning points" not by examining "typical" regions, but by shedding light on each locale's features and unique interactions with the center.[91] Local histories furthermore bring into focus the "symbiotic and dialectical" interactions between center and periphery, which make the former a product of interactions with the latter. Because local histories "have condensed within more general experiences,"[92] historians ought to consider individual regions cases that reshape established, Moscow-centric narratives.

Initially, I selected two administrative divisions to examine, Moscow oblast and Stavropol *krai*; in the course of my research, I also visited the Baltic republic of Lithuania and the archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine in Kyiv. Moscow and Stavropol contrasted in climate and economic conditions, as well as in their distance from the center of power. Moscow suited my purpose because Khrushchev forced farms there to pioneer corn cultivation when he served as the oblast party committee's first secretary from 1949 to

---

[90] Fitzpatrick, "Politics as Practice." For examples of analyses of the relations between the center and the regions, see: Yoram Gorlizki, "Too Much Trust: Regional Party Leaders and Local Political Networks Under Brezhnev," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 676–700. See also: O. V. Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR v 1954–kontse 1950-kh godov: Ustoichivost' i konflikty," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 3 (2007): 31–49. Khlevniuk has brought additional attention to these issues by publishing a collection of documents: O. V. Khlevniuk, ed., *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva: TsK KPSS i mestnye partiinye komitety, 1953–1964 gg*. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009).

[91] Donald J. Raleigh, "Introduction," in *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917–1953*, Donald J. Raleigh, ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 5. Peter Holquist similarly contends that the archives in regions and republics must not simply add "local color" to existing accounts of high politics and ideological conventions, based only on evidence from central archives. Holquist, "A Tocquevillean 'Archival Revolution': Archival Change in the *Longue Durée*," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51 (2003): 77–83.

[92] Raleigh, "Introduction," in *Provincial Landscapes*, ed. Raleigh, 1.

1953.[93] The oblast's cool climate, brief summers, and poor soils placed it well to the north of corn's traditional growing range. Because of his ties to farms in the area and the proximity of the city of Moscow, Khrushchev was able to urge the unfamiliar crop on farm managers. He held up model farms that brought in a crop as examples for others in the oblast and those in neighboring oblasts with similar climates, even though many could not grow corn economically. Farmers in Stavropol krai, far to the south of Moscow in Russia's North Caucasus, had planted corn on a limited scale since the late nineteenth century.[94] Its warm climate suits corn better than most regions of the USSR, although much of the krai suffers from frequent droughts and the irregular parching winds from Central Asia, known as *sukhovei* in Russian. Although harmful to all crops, both particularly damage corn by striking at the critical stages when the crop pollinates and matures. Nonetheless, in favorable years, farms yielded substantial harvests of grain, feed, and hybrid corn seed. The krai's administrators pursued the crusade with enthusiasm: as late as 1953, the krai's corn crop remained miniscule, but by 1956, Stavropol had become the third largest regional producer of corn in the USSR, a position it maintained thereafter. In Lithuania, the center–periphery relationship mixed with the republic's interwar history of independence and underlying nationalism to create unique political conditions that, above and beyond its cool, humid climate, made it a singular case.[95] In Kyiv, a small sample of records of the Central

---

[93] In Moscow, the Central Archive for the Social-Political History of Moscow [*Tsentral'nyi arkhiv obschestvenno-politicheskoi istorii Moskvy*, TsAOPIM] houses the files of party committees for the oblast and the constituent districts. Of particular interest are those of the regional committee (f. 3). Files of the oblast soviet and agricultural department are in the Central State Archive of Moscow Oblast [*Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Moskovskoi oblasti*, TsGAMO].

[94] A similar organization of archives exists in Stavropol, where government documents can be found in the State Archive of Stavropol Krai [*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Stavropol'skogo kraia*, GASK], while the more valuable and accessible records of party committees are in the State Archive for the Contemporary History of Stavropol Krai [*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii Stavropol'skogo kraia*, GANISK], especially the krai party committee (f. 1) and Komsomol committee (f. 63).

[95] In Vilnius, I consulted the records of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania, today housed in the Lithuanian Special Archive [*Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archivas,* LYA]. There, I concentrated on the committee's general and agricultural departments, which included meeting records and district-by-district reports on agriculture (f. 1771). Additionally, the personal files (f. 16895) of Antanas Sniečkus, the republic's party leader for more than three decades proved especially useful.

Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine for the years 1955 and 1956 shed light on cases from the republic's oblasts.[96]

This dissertation consists of seven largely thematic chapters that follow a loose internal chronology. Chapter 1 explores the themes of Khrushchev's interest in industrial agriculture and the USSR's place in the world, both outlined in depth above. Chapter 2, "The Politics of Corn," defines how Khrushchev accumulated the authority to turn his ideals into policy between March 1953 and June 1957, thus shedding light on the efforts that lasted until October 1964 to put them into practice.

Subsequent chapters scrutinize how Khrushchev's twin commitment to corn and industrial farming became policy in practice. They privilege the Soviet administrative apparatus that carried out Khrushchev's initiatives and, in an apparent paradox, simultaneously hindered his ambitions. Chapter 3, "Technologies of Corn," examines ministerial and local bureaucracies as they put into effect two measures Khrushchev designed to make industrial methods a reality on collective and state farms in the late 1950s. First, factories received orders to rapidly produce farm machines required to cultivate corn using mechanized labor rather than expensive manual labor. Second, the USSR imported American equipment and genetic material to quickly establish production of the most advanced hybrids then in use in the US. Chapter 4, "The Struggle for Corn," investigates the officials responsible for putting policy into practice in several regions, paying particular attention to a case from Ukraine's Kyiv oblast that mirrored the larger, more infamous Riazan affair. Additionally, this chapter calls attention to Lithuania, where officials bound by national solidarity worked to create a façade suggesting that they had, as ordered, planted corn in place of pastureland that Khrushchev dismissed as mere "grasses" unsuitable to industrial farming. In this case, as in others featured in chapters 3 and 4, local leaders only created the *appearance* of compliance, even at the risk of disobeying Moscow's

[96] During a brief stopover in Kyiv, I was fortunate to examine some documents in the Ukrainian central committee's departments in the Central State Archive of Social Organizations of Ukraine [*Tsentral'niy derzhavniy arkhiv hromads'kykh ob'iednan' Ukrainy*, TsDAHOU, f. *1*].

orders.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 consider labor and society in Soviet agricultural communities, demonstrating changes in the importance of material rewards, moral incentives, and coercion. The first of these chapters, entitled "The Rhetoric of Corn," surveys the propaganda campaign, capped by Khrushchev's innumerable speeches that resounded in print and broadcast media. It explores how these strategies shaped citizens' appreciation for the corn crusade as a source of material abundance and a campaign worthy of their participation. Chapter 6, "Competing for Corn," uncovers the role of the Komsomol, or Communist Youth League. The organization held annual "Competitions of Youth Corn Growers," in which those in their teens and twenties vied for awards, trophies, and prizes.[97] In some locales, this generation made the corn crusade their own by tending to a majority of corn plantings. By contrast, chapter 7, "The Wages of Corn," sheds light on material incentives—payments in cash or kind that collective farmers earned for their work—which Khrushchev enacted to mitigate the Stalin-era exploitation that often left peasants unpaid. This chapter highlights the transition from the old system to the new in Stavropol krai, offering a portrait of day-to-day life in its unusually large and wealthy farms.

Khrushchev recognized the challenges he confronted in pursuing reform, what Taubman terms "the infernal unreformability of Russia."[98] During a meeting with Cuban leader Fidel Castro at the First Secretary's summer home on the Black Sea coast, Khrushchev explained why real improvement proved nearly impossible. Having dreamed up his idea to divide party committees into industrial and agricultural sectors during a swim in the vacation home's pool, Khrushchev wrote to the Presidium, giving its members time to consider and modify the proposal. He recalled, "A week later, each copy returned without a single change [because]

---

[97] For this, I draw heavily on the records of the Komsomol Central Committee's Department for rural Youth, housed in the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History [*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii*, RGASPI], f. M-1, op. 9.

[98] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 598. Taubman cites a less detailed version of the story from the 1997 edition of the memoir of Soviet official N. S. Leonov. I have used my own translation of the longer version of this story in the 1995 edition.

everyone agreed." Those around him, he implied, did not consider the proposal flawless, but refused to risk contradicting him. Yet even good ideas could not achieve much: "In Russia there is so much inertia that it is almost impossible to overcome it. You would think that I, as First Secretary, could change anything in this country," Khrushchev lamented. "Like hell I can! No matter what reforms I propose or carry out, at bottom, everything stays the same." He then elaborated, developing one of his characteristic metaphors. "Russia is a tub full of dough," he explained, "You put your hand in all the way to the bottom and it seems you are the master of the situation. You pull it out and there is a barely noticeable indentation. Then, before your eyes, it closes up, leaving only the dough."[99] Khrushchev controlled agricultural policy and faced no open challenge to his power; nonetheless, his initiatives fell short of his ambitious aims. Orderly administration proved difficult, so he attempted to overhaul administrative practices. Even these reforms, however, left Khrushchev with less influence than contemporaries imagined and historians have consequently presumed.

[99] N. S. Leonov, *Likholet'e* (Moscow: "Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia," 1995), 90.

CHAPTER 1

THE LOGIC OF CORN: THE SOVIET UNION AND THE INDUSTIRAL IDEAL IN GLOBAL AGRICULTURE

Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev spent Wednesday, September 23, 1959, on a farm near Coon Rapids, Iowa, surveying its cornfields under the watchful eyes of countless eager onlookers and a flock of reporters. During previous stops in Washington, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, the boisterous Soviet premier had played the tourist, hamming for the media that swarmed him throughout his two-week journey across the United States. Among the adventures of "Mr. K" (as the press dubbed him) in America, his tour of Hollywood and dashed dreams of a visit to Disneyland have secured the greatest renown. Yet on the farm of Roswell "Bob" Garst that day, the assembled spectacle of machines, buildings, crops, and animals captivated Khrushchev. Laughing and bantering the entire morning, he engrossed himself in the operation of the hybrid-corn magnate's farm, from field to feedlot. His survey of that Iowan farm was a sign of an interaction possessing great practical significance, and his enthusiasm waned little with the passing of years. In his memoirs, he expressed admiration for Garst and his knowhow, "I walked around Garst's farm and was delighted."[1] "I actually had a dual perception of him," he elaborated. "As a capitalist, he was one of my class enemies. As a man who I knew and whose guest I was, I treated him with great respect and valued him for his knowledge, his selfless desire to share his experience with us."[2] By the time Khrushchev's powder-blue Cadillac convertible sped away, he had satisfied his hunger for the technologies he had come to observe: corn

[1] *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, vol. 3, *Statesman (1953–1964)*, ed. Sergei N. Khrushchev, trans. Stephen Shenfield and George Shriver (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 141.

[2] Ibid., 3:145.

cultivation as an integral component of the industrial ideal dominating American agriculture.[3]

Soviet affinity for American farming technology ran deeper than Khrushchev's visit to Garst's farm that day, or even his interest in corn. Instead, the visit gave form to a longstanding dialogue that, as this chapter explains, provided the inspiration for Khrushchev's crusade to spread corn cultivation across the Soviet Union. In the middle of the 1950s, the scheme provoked puzzlement among foreign observers, who considered it impracticable due to climatic constraints and the crop's unfamiliarity. After Khrushchev's fall in October 1964, commentators retained those assumptions about the illogic of planting corn in the USSR, and therefore few tried to understand the policy. Corn was built into the industrial farming models that spread around the world in the mid twentieth century. Emphasizing that these models provided "the logic of corn," this chapter accounts for preexisting practices in the USSR and Khrushchev's authority to define policy. In addition to giving the corn crusade its rationale, industrial farming principles provided the common thread tying together his agricultural reforms. Recent scholarship on those reforms regards them as a domestic issue, rather than a component of transnational developments.[4] From the famous Virgin Lands campaign to less familiar initiatives to apply genetics, chemistry, engineering, and other knowledge to production, Khrushchev's initiatives drew on an industrial ideal guiding foreign, especially American agriculture. I position agriculture alongside recent scholarship connecting Soviet culture, consumption, media, and technology to pan-European and global developments. Khrushchev's USSR did not remain isolated behind a physical or intellectual "Iron Curtain," but instead

---

[3] Details of the trip, including the Cadillac the local chamber of commerce provided Khrushchev, appeared in the contemporary American press accounts summarized in a recent popular book. See: Peter Carlson, *K Blows Top*, 208.

[4] A small literature examines these links' origins. The most significant is: Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*. For others, see: Kendall E. Bailes, "The American Connection: Ideology and the Transfer of American Technology to the Soviet Union, 1917–1941," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 3 (1981): 421–48; and Dana G. Dalrymple, "The American Tractor Comes to Soviet Agriculture: The Transfer of a Technology," *Technology and Culture* 5, no. 2 (1964): 191–214.

inhabited a matrix of intrasystemic exchange.[5]

That matrix included agricultural technologies and practices, as the Soviet Union developed both corn and industrial farming in a dialogue with kindred tendencies spanning the globe. Farmers gained productivity in a range of social, political, and climatic contexts—first in the United States and then in Europe in the postwar period. Farmers came to rely on "the whole package of modernity," the irrigation, chemicals, fertilizers, educational outreach, technology, scientific knowledge, and the capital—in the form of credit—necessary to acquire these innovations.[6] These also reached the Third World in this period. Although "the Green Revolution" acquired its name only at the end of the 1960s, it began as early as 1943, when the Rockefeller Foundation started the Mexican Agricultural Program. Initial efforts investigated hybrid corn's suitability to Mexican conditions and collected the country's many unique corn landraces. Researchers more successfully developed dwarf wheat varieties, for which American Norman Borlaug won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970.[7] For decades an importer of grain, by 1958 Mexico had used these new wheat cultivars to achieve self-sufficiency.[8] States and nongovernmental agencies, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, put this suite of technologies in the hands of farmers in Latin America and in Asia, and to a lesser extent in Africa. Farmers in India adapted the wheat varieties beginning in 1961, providing a showpiece of the Green

---

[5] György Péteri, "Nylon Curtain: Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe," *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (2004): 113–23.

[6] Noël Kingsbury, *Hybrid: The History and Science of Plant Breeding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 289.

[7] Ibid., 292. These dwarf wheat varieties solved a problem stemming, paradoxically, from conditions too favorable and yields that had become too high: on land fertilized, irrigated, mechanically cultivated, and treated with chemical herbicides and pesticides, existing high-yielding varieties failed because their tall, thin straw could not support a head of grain made too heavy by the higher yield that these ideal conditions enabled. When the grain neared maturity, the plant became susceptible to "lodging": the straw collapsed, leaving the head on the ground and the grain ruined. Breeders solved the problem by crossbreeding varieties that best took advantage of the ideal conditions with dwarf varieties—those with strong straws only two-thirds the normal height—which researchers located in Japan after World War II. This process began in a breeding program at the University of Washington, which provided raw material for Borlaug's breeding programs in Mexico in the 1950s. Ibid., 278–79.

[8] Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution*, 115.

Revolution. By the 1966–67 growing season, the improved wheat covered 504,000 hectares in that country.[9] Its wheat harvest nearly doubled in four years, reaching twenty-three million tons, providing the chronically undernourished country the food security that pessimists had considered impossible a few years before.[10] Similarly, professional breeders identified and utilized dwarfing genes that permitted rice-growers in East and South Asia to reap benefits from fertilizer and irrigation. They transformed Africa's sorghum into a dryland feed crop favored in the western reaches of North America's Great Plains.

Although scholars have devoted attention to the Green Revolution and its Cold War context, they have rarely considered the USSR. Yet its American backers saw agricultural-development programs as a safeguard against Soviet alternatives and communist-inspired insurrections in rural areas. The USSR aggressively pursued many of these technologies, developing new varieties of wheat and other crops, expanding irrigation systems, and adopting new crops such as corn, rice, and sorghum. Soviet efforts contributed to the Cold War contest of development models, meaning that any analysis of global agriculture that leaves the USSR in the background misses vital motivations for and influences on efforts to feed humanity.

To locate the USSR in that global history, I draw on secondary literature situating the corn crusade and industrial principles within the history of the Soviet project. Subsequently, I turn to published sources and archival documents to analyze how agricultural planners utilized those technological and policy templates. In particular, I examine a delegation of Soviet officials that reopened contacts severed during the Cold War's intense initial phase by touring North America in 1955. Surveying Khrushchev's speeches, selected memoirs, publications, and documents from Communist Party and government archives, I reveal how officials came to

---

[9] Kingsbury, *Hybrid*, 300.

[10] For a more thorough analysis of the fears of overpopulation and chronic famine, as well as the case of India, see: Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution*, especially chapter 6, "Hunger, Overpopulation, and National Security," and chapter 8, "Wheat Breeding and the Consolidation of Indian Autonomy, 1940–1970."

regard corn as an important feed crop and conceived a shift in the doctrines guiding agriculture. Emphasizing the concepts motivating agricultural policies, I discern long-term trends rather than the day-to-day changes of Khrushchev's speeches or policies. For the same reason, I concentrate on the words, views, and experiences of the Soviet leader and the small circle of advisors surrounding him. Official print media repeated and amplified the messages these officials conveyed in spoken and written word due to the party and government's monopoly on mass communication. Thus the leaders' words dominated newspapers and simultaneously established the themes of their content.

Soviet leaders focused on the US because of its preeminence in applying the methods of industrial agriculture and America's longstanding centrality in their worldview. The US performed a threefold role as model, benchmark, and competitor. First, portrayals of the other superpower described a society possessing advanced technology that Soviet industry and agriculture might borrow. This evaluation encouraged exchange of agricultural delegations such as the one that visited America in 1955. Second, Soviet authorities measured their country's successes against the rival system, which, as they acknowledged, possessed advanced technology and afforded *some* citizens a comfortable standard of living. Khrushchev promised and earnestly attempted to provide similar comforts to Soviet citizens. Simultaneously, Soviet depictions contrasted American capitalism with the USSR's socialism, claiming that poverty, oppression, joblessness, and racism were inherent in a capitalist society. The range of characteristics ascribed to America may appear paradoxical. The country could embody all of them only because these perceptions encompassed both the actual United States and the America constructed by Soviet discourses about the competitor's society, culture, economy, science, and technology.[11] In this chapter, I strive to distinguish between American society, culture, economy,

[11] Examining Cold War era technology and mobility, historian György Péteri has drawn attention how societies articulate identities in spatial terms: not only "East" and "West," but "ahead" and "behind," "within" and "without." Péteri, "Introduction," 2. Such a division, he argues, made it feasible for Soviet thinkers to ban social ills from their own country and ascribe them to the competitor. Anthropologist Alexei Yurchak has explored how the coding that had existed under Stalin and Khrushchev switched, as

and agriculture, and the corresponding Soviet images of them, which often diverged.

* * *

The Soviet Union participated in global developments in food and agriculture, which paralleled transnational links in science, technology, and culture.[12] Disputing the preconceived notion of an impermeable "Iron Curtain" and reconceiving it as one made instead of *nylon*, historian György Péteri contends that the nylon stocking symbolizes the divergence in the quantity and variety of goods consumers could acquire, but also that it indicates how the curtain was more porous and translucent than heretofore presumed.[13] The curtain's penetrable nature permitted technology, goods, and ideas to circumvent barriers erected during the campaigns against foreign influences that accompanied the Cold War's most intense stage (1947–53).[14] In the Khrushchev era, Soviet society entered a new phase of interaction with the technology and culture of the US and the world.[15] Soviet readers devoured Ernest Hemingway's novels in Russian translation, while moviegoers flocked to see Yul Brynner on the big screen in *The*

Brezhnev-era Soviet society apparently succumbed to sclerosis. This endowed the western "other" with positive associations, while negative ones accumulated around the Soviet "ours." Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[12] Scholars have argued for positioning the USSR in pan-European and international contexts in the interwar period. See: Stephen Kotkin, "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and Interwar Conjuncture," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 1 (2001): 111–64; and David L. Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917–1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 7. More recently, Michael David-Fox has urged a far-reaching reconsideration of the trope of "Russia and the West" in the Soviet period. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[13] Péteri, "Nylon Curtain," 114.

[14] For a study of this phenomenon's influence on material culture, see: Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Kristen Roth-Ey has recently examined post-Stalin Soviet media in this broader, global perspective. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*. For more on the roots of Soviet views of technology and tendency to draw on Western European and especially American applications, see: "Introduction: Tractors, Steel Mills, Concrete, and Other Joys of Socialism," 3–17 in Josephson, *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth?*

[15] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 198.

Magnificent Seven.[16] Youthful Texan Van Cliburn captivated Muscovite audiences in 1958 with virtuoso performances of piano concertos by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff. By the 1960s, blue jeans and the Beatles found popularity among Soviet youth.[17]

Increasing contact with the world in the 1950s combined with the Cold War competition to make material conditions within the USSR critical to Soviet goals. Stressing material culture, consumption, and living standards, or "*byt*" in Russian, historians have argued that these characteristics were integral to how socialist societies functioned, rather than being flaws that doomed them to fail.[18] They contend that many Soviet citizens under Khrushchev considered socialism a better path to development, sustaining faith in its principles and promise.[19] Historian Susan Reid maintains that the scarcity of consumer goods did not ensure the USSR's dissolution, as some observers suggested. Instead, authorities managed citizens' shopping habits and purchases, permitting state socialism to survive as long as it did. Khrushchev chose material living standards as an arena for contesting the struggle between systems, demonstrating his

---

[16] Vail' and Genis, *Shestidesiatye*, 53.

[17] For more on access to foreign culture and goods, see: Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially chapter 3, "Unconscious Agents of Change," 120–67.

[18] During and after the Cold War, scholars contrasted the living standards prevalent under Soviet-style socialism and under capitalism, contending that these proved the superiority of the latter. This only intensified in light of many socialist systems' dissolution between 1989 and 1991. Since then, historians have reevaluated consumption as an object for study, synthesizing strains examining production and political concerns on the one hand with those appraising "culture for culture's sake," on the other. See, for example: Crowley and Reid, eds., *Style and Socialism*.

[19] Historian Vladislav Zubok supports the claim that intensified contact and Soviet citizens' resultant ability to compare their lived reality to that which they viewed abroad, in person or indirectly through film and literature, resulted in a sense of inferiority. Zubok, *Failed Empire*, 176. Susan E. Reid challenges assumptions that Soviet citizens automatically responded to images of American abundance in this way. Acknowledging the anonymous comments' numerous methodological pitfalls, Reid analyzes reactions citizens wrote in books made available to attendees of the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959, the site of the famous "Kitchen Debate" between Khrushchev and Vice-President Richard M. Nixon. She suggests that citizens did not consider their reality deficient because it lacked the consumer comforts that the exhibition represented as their American counterparts' norm. Instead, the responses reveal commitment to Soviet ideals and promises of future abundance. Conceding that variance in living standards influenced the Cold War's outcome, she convincingly asserts that events such as the exhibition did not preordain the result. Reid, "Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (2008): 855–904.

confidence, but also acceptance of the capitalist world's measurements of success. His decision to declare the socialist model an alternative, ostensibly superior version of "modernity" and "the good life" offered potentially great rewards; however, incompletely fulfilling his pledge to "catch up with and overtake America" risked the system's legitimacy.[20] The USSR might live up to socialist ideals, prove its superiority to capitalism, and fashion the communist future only when its citizens enjoyed conditions superior to those available to their American counterparts.

The approach Khrushchev chose for revitalizing Soviet agriculture was part of his effort to prove to the world that socialism offered a preferable model for economic development. Lenin's writings had ensured that the US represented the USSR's competitor, a tenet of Bolshevik ideology reinforced by Stalinist propaganda.[21] In the late 1930s and again during the height of the Cold War in the late 1940s, propaganda gave free rein to anti-Western sentiments and assertions of the USSR's preeminence. Soviet authorities boasted that the USSR had bypassed the conflicts inherent in capitalism, which they characterized as a lesser stage of historical development. Throughout the Khrushchev period, Soviet propaganda called attention to racism, as well as gender and class stratification, in the US and Western Europe. Despite more positive portrayals of the West between 1955 and 1964, the Soviet press reminded audiences that colonial powers oppressed subaltern peoples, Jim Crow laws enforced segregation in the American South, minorities experienced everyday discrimination nationwide, the jobless faced their plight alone, and working-class Americans struggled to make ends meet even in the citadel of capitalist plenty.

Scholarship on Soviet consumption has generally privileged material goods over food, but Khrushchev's ambitions heightened the importance of both in foreign and domestic affairs. Under Stalin, authorities had attempted to provide a few luxuries as harbingers of future

---

[20] Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002), 212–13. See also: Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 26–28.

[21] See: Ball, *Imagining America*, especially chapter 5, "Catch and Surpass," 145–76.

abundance in light of general scarcity.[22] In the postwar years, diets had been meager and cities swelled as millions crowded in, giving rise to fears of protest and unrest. Khrushchev, in contrast to Stalin, aimed to put three square meals a day on the nation's collective table. He proposed to expand food production by cultivating corn and feeding it to livestock, raising output of meat, milk, and eggs. Soviet sources constantly emphasized the significance of food in efforts to improve living standards, equating this task with the advance toward communism. Khrushchev reminded audiences that only abundant food supplies could prove unequivocally that the USSR had transitioned from Stalinist socialism to the ideal society. For instance, he described how "the struggle for high yields of wheat and corn, for higher production of meat, milk, wool and other agricultural products" formed a constituent part of "the construction of communism."[23] Although borrowed in part from capitalist models, corn and industrial farming provided the means for progress to a higher stage of socioeconomic development.

Needed to best capitalist rivals and maintain stability at home, supplies of meat and dairy products required livestock feed, which Khrushchev believed corn could provide. Americans had long eaten more of these foods than Russians, a gap that had expanded after the war as industrial agriculture boosted productivity and drove down prices in the US.[24]

---

[22] Stalin transformed the USSR into a society where a worker could afford champagne, but only if she could locate the rarity. Geist concludes that the first editions of the seminal Stalinist cookbook, the *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food* conveyed a socialist-realist representation of food. The foods on the book's pages—caviar and champagne, to name two—were "often merely incidental to the cultural and ideological objectives of Socialist Realism" and consequently had "little bearing on reality." Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik," 3. The resulting cuisine, he concludes, reflected the personal intervention of A. I. Mikoian, Soviet minster of trade, which produced an "eclectic fusion of prerevolutionary Russian bourgeois cuisine, 'scientific' nutrition, and American industrial models." This last included the hot dogs and ice cream with which Mikoian had returned from the United States in the 1930s. Ibid., 20. For more about the social and political significance of food as consumption, see: Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*.

[23] N. S. Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 258.

[24] This forced the government to intervene by organizing export of the surplus, causing global prices to fall. Warman addresses this issue in depth, exploring the global effects of Public Law 480, which was President Dwight D. Eisenhower's response to this problem. He concludes that, rather than improving living standards in the emerging Third World, imports simply compounded these countries' dependence by altering patterns of production and consumption to the point that the newly independent countries lost their faculty to feed themselves. Warman, *Corn and Capitalism*, 188—89. Soviet authorities noted both

Khrushchev praised corn for its potential to similarly lift Soviet output. Although his speeches frequently incorporated iconic phrases, few became more momentous than his pledge "to catch up with and overtake the United States in per capita production of meat, milk, eggs, and butter." He repeated this slogan throughout the period, first announcing it in 1955 while speaking to agricultural workers gathered in the city of Voronezh.[25] Khrushchev typically stated only that this landmark event would occur "in the coming years." In early 1957, however, he ridiculed the target offered by economists, 1975, and overoptimistically boasted that the USSR would achieve parity in only two or three years' time.[26] The slogan pushed agricultural managers and workers to intensify production, and featured in the Third Party Program adopted in 1961, which promised communism by 1980. As succeeding years' results made this promise ring hollow, however, Khrushchev's impertinence became a focal point for popular dissatisfaction, delegitimizing his leadership and contributing to his fall from power. Soviet leaders realized that the claim that socialism was superior would convince no one if the USSR could not feed and clothe its own people.

The USSR funded projects that demonstrated a socialist alternative to the former colonial powers' capitalist economies.[27] In early 1955, Khrushchev encapsulated the Soviet position by recounting how K. Tursunkulov, chairman of a model collective farm in Uzbekistan, had told him of a visitor from India. Having inspected the farm's fields, facilities, social services,

---

the surpluses and the American government's responses. RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 88, l. 59.

[25] N. S. Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1962), 59.

[26] Some historians have given the impression that this slogan became public only in 1957, as part of the political crisis that broke out that year. For example, see: Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 110. Although Khrushchev's inclusion of specific target year in the 1957 speech in Leningrad was the most important statement for intraparty politics, the idea of competition and the mission to "catch up with and overtake" the US predated that speech and even the Khrushchev era. For the details and political consequences of the boast Khrushchev made in Leningrad, see: Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 305–6.

[27] Roy and Zhores Medvedev conclude that Khrushchev's reforms reflected a desire to portray the USSR as a model to new nations of Africa and Asia, in particular India and Indonesia, for not only industrial put agricultural planning and production. Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 57.

and living spaces, the Indian began to weep. Khrushchev continued, "Comrade Tursunkulov inquired about what had disturbed the guest. 'These are tears of joy in my eyes,' the man answered, 'for your rich and happy life, and tears of bitterness for the millions of impoverished and wretched people of the capitalist countries.'"[28] The audience—Soviet agricultural workers, rather than foreign visitors—suggests one of Khrushchev's purposes: to motivate leaders and laborers to work harder and produce more, not only for their own good, but to realize the USSR's potential and provide convincing evidence for his argument.

Making USSR a model for socialist development and equality that Third World countries should emulate, Khrushchev contrasted socialism with capitalism, wracked by unemployment and inequality. This appeal, and the economic and technical aid that accompanied it, became possible only after the USSR abandoned the indifference Stalin showed toward India after it gained independence in 1947. Relations warmed after 1953, culminating in Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's trip to Moscow in June 1955 and Khrushchev's visit to India that November.[29] Reversing Stalin's stance, Soviet leaders then accepted the possibility of alternative paths to socialism, and extended sums amounting to one quarter of all Soviet aid to the Third World during these years.[30]

Agriculture, and corn especially, became part of the Cold War's competition between systems. The USSR scored major successes in science and technology, as its engineers achieved public relations coups such as the launch of Sputnik. Khrushchev staked his authority and Soviet prestige on these visible triumphs and therefore required a steady stream of them. To reach heavily publicized goals to provide a rich and varied diet, he needed a revolution in agricultural

---

[28] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:38–39.

[29] Shri Ram Sharma, *India–USSR Relations, 1947–1971*, Part I, *From Ambivalence to Steadfastness* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 1999), 26–27.

[30] Ibid., 65. This opening also expanded to encompass cultural phenomena, including nearly two hundred Indian popular films, the products of Bollywood, between 1954 and 1991. Historian Sudha Rajagopalan documents their enormous popularity among the Soviet filmgoers. Rajagopalan, *Indian Films in Soviet Cinemas: The Culture of Movie-Going after Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 3.

output. Turning to the United States for a model, he found it in the industrial ideal in agriculture.

* * *

The corn crusade and the agricultural practices Khrushchev promoted even before he inspected Garst's farm in 1959 demonstrated Soviet commitment to what historian Deborah Fitzgerald terms "the industrial ideal in American agriculture." In *Every Farm a Factory*, she investigates how, after World War I, American engineers and entrepreneurs developed these principles and the associated technologies, especially machines, rural infrastructure, commodity markets, migrant labor, and bank loans. These combined with "capital, raw materials, transportation networks, communication systems, and newly trained technical experts," all of which brought features of "the modern mass production factory and industrial board room" to agricultural production.[31] Output of the most marketable produce at the lowest cost replaced alternative priorities, such as preserving soil, water, local self-sufficiency, biological diversity, cultures, and rural social institutions.

Bolshevik ideology and early Soviet practices made the US a prototype for farms and factories in the USSR. Following the Russian Revolution, some planners embraced Frederick Winslow Taylor's time-motion organization of production and the management techniques of Henry Ford, industrial philosophies that merged into a catchall "Americanism."[32] Soviet critics charged that capitalist origins imbued them with an exploitative character. Advocates maintained that capitalist technology was the most advanced and that socialist conditions would rectify any problems resulting from their parent society, riven with class tension.[33] Bolshevik

---

[31] Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, 3–5.

[32] Bailes, "American Connection," 427. See also: "Introduction: Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth?" 19–63 in Josephson, *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth?* and Ball, *Imagining America*.

[33] Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 146–49. Stites situates socialist intellectuals' commitment to these philosophies within Russians' long tradition of seeking solutions for perceived backwardness in foreign methods and ideologies. One cult of Ford developed among urban intellectuals, who saw the American

convictions held that technology was a set of "value-neutral" tools, invariably more productive under socialism than under capitalism. Soviet building projects initiated during the First Five-Year Plan between 1928 and 1932—including a gigantic steelworks at Magnitogorsk and a modern automobile factory in Gorkii—borrowed American technology, designs, and expertise.[34] During the 1920s when domestic machine-building capacity remained nascent, the USSR imported the majority of its farm machines from the United States.[35] When after 1928 the Soviet Union began to produce tractors, the new factories used plans, housed machine tools, and employed workers all from America to produce copies of American models.[36] Nonetheless, the nonindustrial methods of most Soviet farming during that period and Bolshevik ideology's preference for industry ensured that—with a few exceptions—agriculture received less attention and investment.[37]

At the end of the 1920s, promoters of industrial farming practices spread them to the USSR. Soviet agricultural planners drew inspiration from American models and invited Americans to the USSR to establish demonstration farms, illustrating what Fitzgerald labels "the transfer mentality."[38] This concept encouraged experts on both sides to ignore local differences

---

industrialist's ethos of clean living and ordered working as a model for the chaos of Russian life and labor. On the other hand, peasants counted Ford—the man whose name graced their new tractors—among the heroes of the Revolution. For more on an opponent of these doctrines, P. A. Palchinskii, see: Loren Graham, *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 39.

[34] Josephson, *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth?*, 26. Gorkii reacquired its prerevolutionary name, Nizhnii Novgorod, in 1990. For more on constructing Magnitogorsk, see: Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). On American engineering firms' contributions, see chapter 1, "On the March for Metal," 37–71.

[35] Dalrymple, "American Tractor," 193.

[36] Ball, *Imagining America*, 124–25.

[37] James Scott argues that Lenin's writings on economic organization envisioned industrial scale agriculture and that these principles established the direction of Soviet agricultural development. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 147–168.

[38] Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, 187. James Scott's exploration of high-modernism draws heavily on Fitzgerald's work to connect Soviet agriculture to American and global trends in ways of understanding and reordering the world. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, especially chapter 6, "Soviet Collectivization, Capitalist Dreams," 193–222.

in farming practices and in conditions, whether on America's Great Plains or in Russia's North Caucasus, instead concentrating on those that appeared similar, and therefore subject to the same technological formulas. Fitzgerald concludes that this "rationalizing activity" generated an analytical approach that made devotees of industrial methods consider them "transferable to other countries in what became known as the Green Revolution." Beginning in 1928, Soviet leaders turned to American experts, machinery, and organizational techniques to grow wheat on gigantic state farms in the sparsely populated North Caucasus.[39] Conditions there approximated those of the farms in Montana where the initial experiments with industrial wheat production had taken place. The Americans had little more than a decade's experience with the machines and organizational techniques, but Soviet authorities contracted with them to procure machinery, provide training, and establish industrial-scale farms that dwarfed all others, including the American templates. Profit and curiosity, rather than sympathy for Soviet dreams of building socialism, motivated these Americans, who numbered between 1,000 and 2,000.[40] Quitting the USSR for good when the contracts expired in 1932, these engineers and managers nonetheless left behind working farms employing advanced practices. The number of these gigantic farms remained small and they applied industrial farming methods mostly to planting wheat, rather than progressively to wider areas of production, as American farmers did. Nonetheless, when Khrushchev took charge of Soviet agriculture, he could nurture these precursors of industrial practice.

To a large extent, Soviet leaders' affinity for industrial methods stemmed from ideological preferences for a modernity characterized by technological panaceas, factory organization, and human mastery over nature. They considered natural conditions variables that humans might manipulate to their benefit. Environmental historian Douglas Weiner

---

[39] See: Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory*, especially chapter 6, "Collectivization and Industrialization: Learning from the Soviets," 157–83.

[40] Ibid., 157.

maintains that, especially by the Stalin era, Soviet thinkers considered nature an object to "conquer," one to be "transformed and bent to human will—from the roots up."[41] This "promethean" spirit in Soviet ideology emphasized large-scale transformations of nature. Even if Soviet leaders never achieved their most ambitious schemes, this creed maintained its influence through the era of L. I. Brezhnev (1964–82).[42] Although distinct from Stalin-era industrial forerunners, initiatives such as Khrushchev's Virgin Lands campaign drew on those projects' model of mass mobilization and "pointed to the state's sustained interest in extending its control over nature."[43] The gigantic state farms established in Kazakhstan and Siberia utilized the methods for mechanized, industrial cultivation that the USSR adapted from America.[44] They incompletely adopted anti-erosion plowing methods, including those observed on North America's Great Plains in 1955, and managed soil fertility poorly. Consequently, the semiarid steppe's productivity fell as winds carried away the irreplaceable topsoil, accumulated over centuries. These lands remained productive, but dependent on weather conditions that caused harvests to fluctuate from year to year, making them comparable in output to dryland farms in North America and Australia.[45] Despite serious environmental challenges, the farms in the former Virgin Lands continue to produce significant harvests of wheat today.[46]

---

[41] Weiner, *Models of Nature*, 169.

[42] Examining this principle's continued influence in the Brezhnev era, Christopher Ward refers to the manner in which Soviet propaganda cast Stalin "as a modern-day Prometheus," Greek mythology's Titan who provided fire to humanity. Christopher J. Ward, *Brezhnev's Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 4.

[43] Ibid., 4. In evaluating the legacy of Soviet attitudes toward technology, Loren Graham highlights Soviet affinities in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras for technology and their lack of concern for the human and social costs of the technocratic approach inherent in Stalinism. Graham, *Ghost of the Executed Engineer*, 76.

[44] For more, see: McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*; and Michaela Pohl, "From White Grave to Tselinograd to Astana: The Virgin Lands Opening, Khrushchev's Forgotten First Reform," in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 269–307.

[45] McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 212–13.

[46] "Conservation Agriculture in Northern Kazakhstan," United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Technical Cooperation Programme, http://www.fao.org/tc/tcp/kazakhstan_en.asp. See also: Pohl, "From

Agriculture is humanity's most direct interaction with nature, and technology provides tools useful for structuring that relationship.[47] During the nineteenth century and increasingly in the twentieth, developing practices reshaped farming in the industrializing world. New resources and novel technologies transformed traditional "closed" systems into "open" ones dependent on capital and technology.[48] During the Khrushchev era, the Soviet Union invested considerable resources in factories to "fix" nitrogen, producing the fertilizer needed for "open" farming systems, a process in which Soviet capacity lagged behind capabilities of the United States and Western Europe. This innovation, although slower to arrive in the USSR, embodied the Soviet version of applying technology to farming.

The scope of Khrushchev's commitment to industrial farming indicated an accelerating advance in applying these technologies on Soviet farms compared to the Stalin period. During the 1930s, in addition to state farms, the USSR had established thousands of machine-tractor stations (*mashinno-traktornye stantsii*, MTSs) that parceled out machinery and trained agricultural specialists to the collective farms. Violent collectivization of peasant farms across

---

White Grave to Tselinograd," 272.

[47] Perkins argues that technology serves this critical mediating role, making agriculture simultaneously an economic and an ecological process. Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green* Revolution, 5.

[48] Historian Edward D. Melillo employs these terms to describe a historical process critical to industrial agriculture—an open system and a historical transformation of what Marx termed humans' "metabolic" relationship to the natural world. Melillo, "The First Green Revolution: Debt Peonage and the Making of the Nitrogen Fertilizer Trade, 1840–1930," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012), 1035. Acute lack of nitrogen constrains "closed" systems of agriculture. Even though the gas forms the majority of the Earth's atmosphere, it typically takes inert molecular form. Over millennia, agriculturalists developed techniques—planting legumes and applying animal manures—to renew "fixed" nitrogen in the soil, the usable form that all other plants deplete. "Open" systems became possible when farmers could acquire the necessary nitrogen from sources far afield. In the nineteenth century, natural mineral fertilizers discovered in the deserts of South America's west coast attracted capital, wage labor, transportation, and communication systems for transporting and marketing them made these systems viable. Open systems became more economical following the World War I, during which German scientists and engineers perfected the Haber–Bosch process. A chemical reaction consumes energy to force inert nitrogen from the air to bond under high pressure and temperature, in the presence of a catalyst, into useable ammonia. The resulting compound serves as the basis not only for synthetic fertilizers, a building block of life, but also for the high explosives that make modern warfare possible. On the history of the Haber–Bosch process, see: Thomas Hager, *The Alchemy of Air: A Jewish Genius, a Doomed Tycoon, and the Scientific Discovery that Fed the World but Fueled the Rise of Hitler* (New York: Harmony Books, 2008).

the country permitted the state to collect grain procurements through the MTS, achieving Stalin's goal of control only at great cost to rural economies and communities. He predicted that combining peasant smallholders' farms, livestock, and equipment would allow mechanization and economies of scale by creating large collectives.[49] Although by global standards collective farms could access substantial machinery and capital, they remained insufficient to realizing modernist visions of industrial-scale production. The state and party invested too little time, attention, and resources to the collective farms, undermining benefits that might have accrued from actually applying industrial principles.

After 1953, reforms made farms able to put industrial principles into wider use. Disbanding the MTSs in 1958 and forcing the collective farms to purchase machinery themselves, Khrushchev hoped the farms would efficiently use the increasing number of tractors and laborsaving implements.[50] The industrial ideal also encouraged his fixation on corn as a panacea for the afflictions of agriculture. Renewed contacts with the US spurred Soviet officials to adopt technologies applicable to planting, cultivating, and harvesting corn and other row crops; applying synthetic fertilizers; employing chemical pesticides; developing high-yielding hybrid seeds; and putting those seeds into production. In the second half of the 1950s, technological solutions to problems in corn production transformed it on Soviet farms from a labor-intensive niche crop limited to southern regions into, at least on paper, one at the center

---

[49] Sheila Fitzpatrick examines the motivations that Stalin expressed when he sounded the advance to begin collectivization. The exemplary farm that he described in his January 1928 speech shared the state farms' large scale, mechanization, and orientation toward producing grain for state procurement, the Soviet equivalent of marketable surplus. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 39.

[50] In the 1950s, price and other reforms bolstered the collectives to the point that the strongest among them strained under the external interference. Khrushchev orchestrated the sale of the machine tractor stations' equipment to the collective farms as a remedy. The breakneck speed, unwarranted scope, and authoritarian methods with which the party and state bureaucracies implemented the decision—in the span of a few months rather than several years Khrushchev initially proposed—demonstrate the impediments to orderly implementation of policy. Most historians have generally judged this episode an example of the haphazard nature of Khrushchev's reforms. Although not given to undue praise of the Soviet leader, Zelenin termed it "[o]ne of the most progressive, anti-totalitarian of Khrushchev's socio-economic reforms" based on the policy's intentions, if not its results. Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 276.

of a modern, mechanized system of industrial farming. Although implemented by Soviet farms difficulty, the technologies defined Soviet policy. Khrushchev transformed preexisting aspirations into guidelines for practice to such a degree that industrial farming methods took hold, expanding their reach even after his removal from power in 1964. Although his policies achieved uneven results, the reasonably coherent fashion in which they embodied the industrial ideal demonstrates the allegiance that he and his supporters owed to these global trends.

This commitment to industrial farming competed with alternative visions for organizing agriculture that had enjoyed official backing under Stalin. Soviet soil scientists developed the "grassfield," or *travopol'e* system of land management, which became universal as part of Stalin's policy. Preferring intensively managed "closed" systems of crop rotations incorporating legumes to maintain soil fertility and on plowing regimes to improve soil structure, that system compensated for shortfalls in organic and synthetic fertilizers, as well as machines, all necessary to implement high-input "open" systems of industrial agriculture. Considering the methods orthodox under Stalin incapable of achieving his goals, Khrushchev zealously rooted them out. As early as 1954, he charged, "On a number of state farms the land is used for grasses, which means that practically [the farms] are planting nothing. There are a lot of grasses, but no livestock feed. This means it is necessary to plant not grass, but corn, wheat, and similar crops, which produce more."[51] He argued that rotations had to fit local climatic conditions, a contrast to his demands for almost indiscriminant expansion of corn to every region. This call to eliminate grasses reflected his devotion to industrial farming. He insisted that Soviet farms had to apply synthetic fertilizers and chemical herbicides to improve productivity, allowing farms to grow high yields of corn where clover and hay, requiring low inputs of labor and yielding modest harvests, had once reigned. Deeply integrated in industrial farming in America, corn thrived where chemicals have eradicated pests and synthetic nitrogen has eliminated constraints on fertility. Choosing industrial agriculture, Khrushchev reinforced his own preferences and

[51] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:220.

replicated practices Soviet experts observed in America as early as 1955.[52]

In the Soviet case, the selection of corn to provide feed was a political rather than a technocratic choice, in which Khrushchev's influence proved decisive. The exact moment he became acquainted with the crop is unclear, but it long predated 1953. He claimed in his memoirs that his first encounter with it occurred as a child in his home village, located in what was then the Russian Empire's Kursk province. His grandmother and her fellow peasants raised corn in kitchen gardens, serving the ears as a summertime delicacy.[53] Khrushchev spent his youth and young-adult years in Ukraine, where duties as a skilled worker, Red Army soldier, and party organizer in the Donbas industrial region kept him detached from agriculture. In his memoirs, he only remarked that corn grew near the metallurgical plant where he worked.[54]

Khrushchev's first exposure to corn as a field crop likely occurred in Ukraine in the late 1930s. While Khrushchev was away climbing the ranks of the Moscow city party organization in the early 1930s, the government supported limited research on corn and halting efforts to promote the crop, which achieved little.[55] In 1937, after eight years in Moscow, Khrushchev became responsible for farms when he returned to Ukraine to serve as Stalin's satrap. There, Khrushchev absorbed information about corn's potential by observing researchers and collective farmers in the fields. Drawing on interviews with Khrushchev's personal agricultural advisor

---

[52] He initiated his full-scale assault on the system and its defenders only in the early 1960s. For instance, he pressed his claim in a 1961 speech to a conference of agricultural workers by contrasting the grasses Soviet farms planted to grow feed with Garst's farm, where corn dominated. N. S. Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 60–61. See also: Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 517; and Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 195.

[53] *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, vol. 2, *Reformer (1945–1964)*, ed. Sergei N. Khrushchev, trans. Stephen Shenfield and George Shriver (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), 398–99.

[54] *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 3:141.

[55] Soviet leaders sponsored a halting expansion of corn cultivation, evidenced by a spate of articles touting the crop's potential as a staple. They began research into corn hybrids, then on the cutting edge of American farming technology. The Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences (*Vsesoiuznaia akademiia sel'skokhoziaistvennoi nauk imeni V. I. Lenina*, VASKhNIL) established a shortlived institute for research on corn at Dnipropetrovsk in Ukraine. These measures achieved minimal practical benefit and Soviet authorities quietly abandoned them. See: David Joravsky, *The Lysenko Affair* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 285–86.

A. S. Shevchenko, an advocate for corn, historian Anatolii Strelianyi writes that the future leader's friend and collaborator A. I. Mikoian informed him of corn's importance as food and animal feed in the United States in the late 1930s, following a visit as part of his duties as minister of trade.[56] Strelianyi explains that Khrushchev fully converted to corn after Ukraine saved itself in 1949 from a repeat of the crop failures in 1946–47 by replacing wheat killed by frost and drought with nearly 2 million hectares of corn, which allowed the republic to meet Stalin's crushing grain procurement quota.[57] That year, corn fulfilled its longstanding role for peasants in the region as a crop of last resort.[58]

Returning to Moscow in late 1949 as a devoted advocate for corn, Khrushchev assumed a position in the Central Committee's halls of power as one of a handful of secretaries, as well as leader of the city's influential party organization. He valued corn enough that he badgered local collective farms into planting the crop, previously unfamiliar in Moscow oblast. Political competition and conflicts over agricultural policy with G. M. Malenkov, a rival for Stalin's favor and for control over agricultural policy, restrained Khrushchev's ambitions until after the despot's death.[59] Khrushchev considered himself more attuned to agriculture and the needs of the downtrodden peasantry. Moreover, his experience with corn and knowledge of foreign practices convinced him of the crop's potential as a source of livestock feed, shortages of which

---

[56] Anatolii Strelianyi, "The Last Romantic," in *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2:573. On Shevchenko as an advocate for corn, see: Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 137.

[57] Khrushchev told versions of this story on several occasions. A. A. Fursenko, ed. *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954–1964*, vol. 1, *Chernovye protokol'nye zapisi zasedanii: Stenogrammy* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 466; and N. G. Tomilina, et al., eds. *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva tsveta vremeni; Dokumenty iz lichnogo fonda N. S. Khrushcheva*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2009), 94.

[58] Warman, *Corn and Capitalism*, 109. For more on prerevolutionary uses of corn and corn's arrival in the Russian Empire, see: Sazanova, *Istoriia rasprostraneniia kukuruzy*. A product of the Khrushchev era, Sazanova's history overemphasizes the early arrival and rapid spread of corn. It abounds, however, with textual references, visual representations, and other information on the period between the seventeenth and the early twentieth centuries.

[59] On this phase of Khrushchev's rise, see: Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 227–30.

had constrained plans to improve animal husbandry developed at the end of the Stalin period.[60]

The corn crusade did not fully take root until 1955, but Khrushchev highlighted the potential of corn as a feed crop in early remarks about agriculture, including a speech to the Central Committee plenum in September 1953. "It is not accidental that corn has become widespread in a host of countries with advanced animal husbandry," he reported. "Yet in the USSR, even in regions where corn grows best, it occupies an extremely small area." He reprimanded the assembled party leaders, especially those from Ukraine and other southern regions for the falling hectarage of corn and their lagging attentiveness to it.[61] He referred to the US only implicitly, but in February 1954, he insisted to a gathering of state-farm workers that they should plant more corn because American counterparts did: corn plantings in the USSR amounted to only 3.6 percent of arable land, while in the US that figure was 36 percent.[62]

The abundance Khrushchev envisioned required not incremental growth in agricultural output, but a leap forward on the basis of corn. The USSR had witnessed production revolutions in industry during the five-year plans of the 1930s, but Khrushchev now wanted to master corn, plow up the Virgin Lands, provide more machines, use more fertilizer, and quickly reap rewards of more meat, milk, eggs, butter, and other desirable foods. Given world trends in agriculture and prior transformations achieved under the Soviet system, Khrushchev's faith in a rapid and thorough transformation of Soviet agriculture through rocketing growth appears less "harebrained" and more sensible.

* * *

To achieve these goals, the Soviet experts sought the required technologies and methods

---

[60] On Khrushchev's knowledge of foreign practice, see: "K novym uspekham sotsialisticheskogo sel'skogo khoziaistva Ukrainy: Doklad tov. Khrushcheva N. S. na soveshchanii partiinogo, sovetskogo i kolkhoznogo aktiva Kievskoi oblasti, 28 ianvaria 1941 goda," *Pravda* (February 10, 1941): 4. On Stalin era programs to produce more livestock feed, see: Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 39.

[61] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:27.

[62] Ibid., 1:165.

in the American Corn Belt, especially the state of Iowa. Soviet scientists and engineers examined American models that proved specific industrial farming techniques' feasibility. A delegation of Soviet agricultural authorities sent to the United States in the summer of 1955 established ties that developed into sustained contact.[63] Additionally, in 1959, Khrushchev saw American agriculture for himself during his visit to the US, and to Iowa. He furthermore sustained a decade-long friendship with Bob Garst, the man whom Taubman dubbed the Soviet leader's "guru" on all things related to corn, but who promoted industrial farming in general.[64]

Soviet experts had scant information about developments in American agriculture between 1935 and 1955. In the autumn of 1955, at his first meeting with Khrushchev, Garst asked why Soviet leaders knew so little about American practices, information freely available in any farm journal, when they had stolen secrets about nuclear weapons programs. Bursting into laughter, Khrushchev replied, "You locked up the atomic bomb, so we had to steal it. When you offered us information about agriculture for nothing, we thought that might be what it was worth."[65] Their lack of knowledge was actually a consequence of geopolitical and ideological conflict. After the enthusiasm of the 1920s and the First Five-Year Plan, direct ties with the US and Americans experts working in the USSR became rare.[66] Soviet trade, scientific, and technical delegations visited the US sporadically before 1947, primarily in concert with the wartime alliance. Intense antiforeign sentiment in the USSR and anticommunism in the USS

---

[63] The principle archival sources for this section include a three-volume text reporting the delegation's findings, submitted to the USSR Ministry of Agriculture in early 1956 and housed in its archival collection. RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, dd. 88–90. The Central Committee archives contain a stenographer's record of oral presentations made to a gathering of party leaders, most importantly Khrushchev himself, in October 1955, soon after the delegation's return from North America. RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107. Khrushchev's questions, comments, and interjections make this report invaluable to understanding his thinking. Finally, delegation members published accounts in books and in the periodical press. For the primary example, see: V. V. Matskevich, *Chto my videli v SShA i Kanade* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1956).

[64] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 372.

[65] Harold Lee, *Roswell Garst: A Biography* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1984), 189.

[66] Bailes, "American Connection," 441.

that accompanied the Cold War's deepest chill brought these exchanges to a halt. After Stalin's death, in response to relaxation signaled by a summit meeting in Geneva in July 1955, reciprocal agricultural delegations renewed contacts, which quickly expanded to encompass parallel technical, educational, and cultural delegations.[67]

The status of the officials and specialists from the USSR Ministry of Agriculture that made up the delegation indicated the gravity that Soviet authorities assigned to the exchange. Deputy Minister—soon to become Minister—V. V. Matskevich headed it, and it included Khrushchev's personal agricultural advisor A. S. Shevchenko, corn-breeder B. P. Sokolov, and nine other engineers, scientists, and administrators. In the winter of 1955, the editors of *The Des Moines Register* learned that Khrushchev had praised corn and extended an unofficial invitation to Soviet experts. The State Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded an agreement to exchange this delegation of Soviet officials for one to the USSR comprised of American private citizens. The Soviet officials' journey took them from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and they subsequently stopped in several Canadian provinces. They nonetheless focused on the Corn Belt, especially Iowa. They visited farms, agricultural colleges, private companies, factories manufacturing machines, and other institutions that provided the organizational and technical support for industrial farming. They met with farmers, professors, engineers, corporate executives, political leaders, and many others. The delegation's predeparture objectives included studying land management, animal husbandry, machinery, and research practices.[68] In each sphere, they found industrial farming the guiding principle and corn the primary crop. They were also fascinated by features of American culture, society, and daily life, from the political climate to soda fountains.

---

[67] Walter Hixson concentrates on American actions and responses to cultural exchanges, but briefly mentions the agricultural delegation of 1955. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 105.

[68] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 88, l. 1. Matskevich's predeparture agenda noted similar tasks. RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 76, ll. 67–68 and ll. 71–75.

Examining American farming practices, society, and economics, the Soviet specialists juxtaposed those conditions and Soviet equivalents, reinforcing their preconceived notions about America and their own country. Consequently, they noted with envy American farmers' practical techniques, while accentuating socioeconomic trends they considered the repercussions of markets and of capitalism. They marveled at American farmers' abilities to specialize by applying machines, science, and laborsaving technologies, but they devoted special attention to those used for growing corn and raising livestock. By underscoring differences between Soviet and American practices, the delegation showed their esteem for American technology, which concealed tacit suppositions about Soviet weaknesses.

The delegation's written report demonstrates the presumption that technologies resulting from capitalist competition were value-neutral and therefore applicable under socialism. It praises the quality, quantity, and diversity of machines in use on the well-equipped American farms. The document concludes that capitalism not only permitted, but *required* those capital-intensive production methods because those farmers unable to keep up in adopting the latest, most productive technologies would be driven out of business. It blames monopolies' control over the prices farmers received for produce and those paid for the inputs they purchased. This difference in prices, it asserted, "constantly crushes" the farmers and therefore, "in order to make ends meet, [they] strive to increase marketable output and seek new means to limit expenditure of labor per unit of production."[69] Considering pressures on capitalists to seek profit and compete to ruin one's neighbor inherent laws of capitalism, the report compares them to Soviet ideals, extolling the superiority of a system where no market and no hidden monopoly forced socialist farms to struggle to simply maintain solvency. From the Soviet perspective, the technologies allowing an individual American farmer to outproduce a collective farmer under socialism revealed the economic injustices ingrained in capitalism. By contrast, Soviet domestic and foreign propaganda labeled socialist farms the most egalitarian

[69] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 88, l. 58.

and mechanized in the world. In his September 1953 speech, Khrushchev had contrasted socialist with capitalist agriculture, contending that it was "common knowledge . . . that modern agricultural machinery is concentrated in the hands of a small number of capitalist farmers, while manual labor and primitive machinery persist on the farms of the remaining majority of laboring peasants."[70] Even finding machinery widely distributed among American farmers, the Soviet delegation also saw that reality as a sign of the pernicious forces of capital.

Soviet officials discovered the socioeconomic maladies their Marxist ideology preconditioned them to expect, such as capitalism's erosion of farmers' social and economic situation. Delegation members observed a declining number of farms and the increasing average size of those that remained, a fact backed by American statistics. They thus discerned an acceleration of the inherent destructive processes that gathered the means of production in the hands of the few. "The concentration of production," they noted, "and the elimination of the smaller farms by the larger reaffirms Lenin's axiom that capitalism's fundamental and principal tendency is to eliminate small-scale production in both industry and agriculture."[71] The delegation diagnosed a historical trend that American officials acknowledged, although they considered it positive, and which continues to be visible as the cyclical squeezing of American family farms that allows corporations to consolidate land into increasingly large industrial operations.

Judging socialist principles superior, the officials who visited the US nonetheless underscored efficiencies resulting from specialization. They argued that capitalist competition created "division of labor" unlike anything found in Soviet practice. It raised American farmers' productivity by allowing them to buy food and supplies they might produce only less efficiently at home. The Soviet experts concluded that this practice raised productivity, but at a risk: "Being connected to many firms [as a result], in the event of unfavorable market conditions for

---

[70] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:11.

[71] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 88, l. 26.

agricultural commodities, they fall into debt, descend into dependence on the firms, and are ruined."[72] Each Soviet farm and agricultural district, by comparison, supplied itself to the greatest degree possible, producing seeds, spare parts, food products, and other essential goods locally. Given the absence of the threat of financial ruin ingrained in capitalism, Soviet farms might benefit more from American-style specialization.

In this and other ways, Soviet officials reaffirmed the superiority of state and collective farms, which offered stability in contrast to the precarious production relations of American capitalism. Addressing problems with labor, pay, taxation, and state procurements, reforms enacted in 1953 gave Soviet officials renewed confidence in their conviction that socialist farms embodied worthier principles.[73] They stressed, "Having actually witnessed the destruction of small farmers in the USA and Canada, our socialist system's enormous advantages became clearer." According to the delegation, "Given our large-scale farms [and] planned economy, we enjoy enormous advantages over the USA. Our collective and state farms . . . can quickly increase output of agricultural products and decrease production costs by more effectively employing machines and organizing production."[74] Their findings on the consequences of capitalist competition reinforced the contrast between the United States as a source of practical methods and a socioeconomic system burdened by inherent crises.

The delegation balanced admiration for American practices with an aversion to the society capitalism produced, reflecting the need to conform to the Soviet ideological worldview. Making assertions about the capitalist economy's "intrinsic contradictions," as in an article published by Matskevich in early January 1956, officials justified their focus on technology and

---

[72] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 88, l. 116.

[73] It is therefore clear that neither Khrushchev nor other Soviet leaders contemplated dissolving the collectives, only strengthening them. Their evident commitment did not prevent widespread rumors in the immediate postwar period of plans to break them up. From Sovietologists' perspective, it remained possible to speculate as late as 1955 that new reforms might end the experiment with collectives. Volin, "Khrushchev's Economic Neo-Stalinism," 455.

[74] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 88, l. 27.

practices and, thereby, avoided discussing areas in which an alert Soviet reader might discern an unfavorable comparison with his or her own reality.[75] Internal reports addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture and to the highest leadership in the Central Committee, however, praised American practices at the expense of Soviet counterparts, albeit cautiously. These internal reports followed conventions dictated by ideology, but also went beyond the boundaries that propagandistic aims imposed on public statements.

Finding that American farmers specialized in producing only crops most suited to the local climate, the Soviet experts implied that the USSR might benefit from applying similar principles. They concluded that the "decisive prerequisite for the high level of agricultural output in the USA is . . . the distribution and specialization of production based on a fuller use of natural and economic conditions of individual regions."[76] Each American region gained advantages by growing only crops appropriate to local temperature, daylight, rainfall, and soil conditions. To illustrate, Soviet experts decided that Iowa nearly perfect for growing corn.[77] Although they did not acknowledge it, the Soviet Union's climate put limits on agriculture in general, and specifically on corn cultivation.[78] Khrushchev frequently expressed confidence that technology would permit Soviet farms to overcome such challenges; for instance, they might remedy shortages of rainfall by building irrigation systems and developing methods to retain the precipitation that fell as snow during winter in the fields, rather than letting it run off in the spring thaw. Scientific breeding held out the prospect of cold-resistant, fast-developing varieties

---

[75] V. V. Matskevich, "Sovetskaia sel'skokhoziaistvennaia delegatsiia v SShA i Kanade," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (January 11, 1956): 3.

[76] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 88, ll. 40–50.

[77] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 22.

[78] Soviet regions benefitting from sufficient rainfall lacked the warm temperatures and long growing season corn requires. Those with warm temperatures received insufficient rainfall or were subject to hot, dry summer winds impairing corn's pollination. Drought and frost loomed, frequently striking even breadbasket regions. Severe limits on crops imposed by the variability of frost-free periods combined with frequent droughts, which strike frequently in southern Russia, Ukraine, and the North Caucasus. To illustrate, drought occurred in a major grain-producing region in twenty-seven of the ninety-two years between 1891 and 1983. Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems*, 7.

of corn that would achieve later stages of maturity in northern regions. In their written report, the delegation's members noted the potential of research observed in both the US and Canada.[79] For these reasons, they devoted special attention to the methods and hybrids farmers employed in the northerly reaches of corn cultivation in North America, in the Dakotas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ontario. So well known was Khrushchev's interest in such hybrids that, when he met President John F. Kennedy in Vienna in 1961, Secretary of State Dean Rusk hinted to Khrushchev about a new one purportedly reaching full maturity faster than any other. In response, the Soviet agricultural attaché in Washington searched for information about it, finding nothing.[80]

Regional specialization embodied the industrial ideal in practice by prioritizing the greatest production at the lowest cost, regardless of location, and then using modern transportation to distribute the output. This conflicted with Soviet agricultural planning under Stalin, which had favored regional self-sufficiency as a remedy to dysfunctional transportation and distribution systems that impeded regular deliveries of food to urban populations. Khrushchev abandoned this policy in favor of regional specialization.[81] Approving of the delegation's findings, he inveighed against growing crops where their yields remained lower than average in the name of self-sufficiency. It was more rational to free some regions from deliveries of grains and vegetables, shifting production of these foods to places where farms harvested higher yields. As a consequence of Stalin's policy, Khrushchev grumbled, "we manage planning policy completely without a plan."[82] Yet his support of choosing crops based on local conditions contradicted the fact that the very same year, his orders caused Soviet officials to spread corn cultivation aggressively and with little regard for the local climate.

---

[79] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 89, l. 154.

[80] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 361, ll. 196–202. Khrushchev mentioned his interest in the rumored hybrid in a speech later that year. Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 6:31.

[81] Some scholars noted this trend at the time, for example: Anderson, "Soviet Corn Program," 123.

[82] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 180.

Khrushchev's most famous programs, including the Virgin Lands campaign and the corn crusade, together embodied the principle of regional specialization. Before a Central Committee plenum in June 1954, he first outlined how the Virgin Lands program, set in motion earlier that year, was a foundation for further initiatives. The extensive growth in harvests of wheat grown on industrial-scale farms in Siberia, Kazakhstan, and other thinly populated regions promised to free settled areas of European Russia, the North Caucasus, and Ukraine for intensive livestock production. To achieve this latter goal, Khrushchev ordered farms in those locales to cut plantings of wheat and other staple grains, and expand those of corn needed to feed growing herds and for lifting their productivity. This boom in animal husbandry would deliver enough meat, milk, and eggs not only for local consumption, but also for urban centers around the USSR.[83]

If American farmers' climatic advantages were not sufficient, the delegation reasoned, then history provided them with an additional upper hand. No warfare had marred America's settled regions since the Civil War nearly a century prior.[84] The Soviet Union in just fifty years had passed through the Great War, Revolution, and its own Civil War, a period of crisis and privation (1914–21) that continued through collectivization and famine (1928–33) and culminated in the war against Nazi Germany (1941–45). Combat and German atrocities destroyed tens of thousands of rural communities in European Russia and Ukraine. The USSR required years to return collective farms even to prewar levels of production and capital investment. Even the perseverance necessary to recover from those blows encouraged Soviet leaders to consider their system remarkable.

Finding much to consider during inspections of American manufacturers of farm machines, A. A. Ezhevskii, the delegation's chief engineer, emphasized to Khrushchev the quality and quantity of American tractors, as well as the variety of implements and

---

[83] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:331.

[84] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 122.

supplementary machines. Ezhevskii stated that the number of tractors had risen from 1.5 million in 1950 to more than 4.5 million in 1954, while the number of people working on farms had fallen from 13.5 to 8.5 million, meaning that "the level of mechanization in the USA is very high."[85] Although it remained unspoken, the comparison made clear that the quantity of American equipment outstripped the number of Soviet machines, contradicting Khrushchev's claim just two years prior that Soviet farms boasted more machines than those in any other country.[86] Ezhevskii added that American farms "possess a multitude of diverse machines, enabling complete mechanization of various productive and supplementary tasks."[87] Each permitted a single American farmer to produce more at less cost—the primary objective of industrial agriculture.

Having considered the American practices he had observed, Ezhevskii proposed to retool Soviet factories to manufacture not whole pieces of farm equipment, but standardized components (engines at one, transmissions at another, and so on). Other factories might then assemble these into complete machines of more specific function, at lower cost, and in locations conveniently located near agricultural regions. Pointing to procedures used in factories of the International Harvester Company, Deere & Company, and other American manufactures, he argued that this measure offered increased productivity.[88] In addition to becoming the building blocks of new equipment, the individual components could also serve as spare parts that, due to flaws in the planning system, Soviet factories did not supply in quantities sufficient to repair existing machines.[89] Lauding Ezhevskii's analysis of American practice and Soviet realities,

---

[85] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 2.

[86] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:8.

[87] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 2.

[88] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 53.

[89] For more on this problem, see: Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization: The Consolidation of the Modern System of Soviet Production Relations, 1953–1964* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 15.

Khrushchev enthusiastically approved the proposal. He declared, "This is an illustration of what I was just talking about. Comrade Ezhevskii visited America and is drawing his own conclusions. What kinds of conclusions? He is drawing Russian conclusions. . . . This is our Soviet American (*sovetskii amerikanets*)."[90] Loaded with historical significance, this term connoted an individual conversant in foreign technological expertise, but also able to turn a critical eye on it. Instead of blindly copying American machines and manufacturing methods, the Soviet American accounted for the realities of state socialism in melding the achievements of both into a superior solution to a given problem.[91]

Praising Ezhevskii's knowhow, Khrushchev contrasted it with the petty concerns of the bureaucrats in charge of the centralized ministries managing the Soviet economy, whom he frequently disparaged. Unlike the innovative Ezhevskii, Khrushchev complained, the bureaucrats only defended their own prerogatives to control raw materials, labor, and factories.[92] He implied that they would reject Ezhevskii's proposals because, even though more machines and a supply of spare parts might result, declining production by a given ministry's proprietary factories might concomitantly decrease its bureaucratic masters' power.

The delegation's written and oral reports on double-cross hybrid corn also indicate that Soviet officials had begun to view the controversial science of genetics as a value-neutral technology.[93] Hybrid corn therefore reveals details about that discipline, the epicenter of the

---

[90] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 53.

[91] According to Bailes, the term "Russian American" (an equivalent, as Khrushchev's usage of "Russian conclusions" rather than "Soviet" suggests) appeared during the USSR's infancy as part of debates over the proper models for socialist industry, management, and machinery. Bailes, "American Connection," 428. For more, see: Ball, *Imagining America*, 26–30.

[92] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 54.

[93] For my purposes, the distinction between hybrids divided intervarietal, hybrids and double-cross hybrids. Favored by much-maligned Soviet biologist T. D. Lysenko and his supporters, the former result from crossing two genetically heterogeneous, open-pollinating varieties of corn. Specialists create varieties by selecting for desirable characteristics over several generations from samples of locally adapted forms known as landraces, themselves the result of prescientific selection practices. Double-cross hybrids offer a greater increase in yields but require delicate and labor-intensive work. Researchers use a delicate manual process to self-pollinate several generations of plants of a variety exhibiting desirable traits,

contentious history of science in the USSR. Scholars have subjected to extensive inquiry the decades-long struggle between advocates for classical genetics derived from the work of Gregor Mendel and their bane, T. D. Lysenko.[94] Because hybrid corn featured prominently in the delegation's investigations in America, and because Lysenko's ideas defined Soviet plant breeding, a brief digression into the history genetics in the USSR will orient the ensuing discussion. Accounting for the negative consequences of the doctrines of Lysenko and his supporters, the dissident historian and biologist Zhores Medvedev considered hybrid corn an illustrative case. As early as the 1930s, Lysenko and his camp had registered hostility to inbred lines and double-cross hybrids by incorrectly regarding their yields as inferior to those of intervarietal hybrids.[95] Lysenko condemned American advances chiefly because they contradicted his theories postulating the inheritance of acquired characteristics, but also on account of the general campaign against foreign ideas. He did so, however, at the very moment

---

producing inbred lines that reliably express those traits. The inbred lines have little production value, however, because they produce low yields. Breeders overcome this phenomenon by crossing two or—more commonly in the 1950s—four distinct lines, resulting in single- and double-cross hybrids, respectively. They are genetically uniform and express the desirable characteristics of each parent line, but they also take advantage of *heterosis*, or "hybrid vigor" to produce yields higher not only than the parent lines, but also superior to landraces, varieties, and intervarietal hybrids. There is a catch: heterosis and its attendant yields persist for only that first generation. The time-sensitive and labor-intensive processes of crossing the parental lines to grow new seed, typically by specialized seed companies or research stations, must happen each year. For more on this process and its consequences, see: Kingsbury, *Hybrid*, 217–50.

[94] This began in the 1930s with the purge on political grounds—and sometimes the death—of Lysenko's foes, most notably the geneticist and specialist in the natural history of plant domestication N. I. Vavilov. Among the scholarly treatments of this history, see: Zhores A. Medvedev, *The Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko*, ed. Lucy G. Lawrence, trans. I. Michael Learner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Joravsky, *Lysenko Affair*; and the recent archive-based reevaluation by Ethan Pollock, "From *Partiinost'* to *Nauchnost'* and Not Quite Back Again: Revisiting the Lessons of the Lysenko Affair," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (2009): 95–115. The Lysenko saga has loomed so large in the scholarship that historians have undertaken archive-based studies of disciplines other then genetics science to illuminate the possibility of alternative outcomes to the rule of a single eccentric such as Lysenko. Alexei B. Kojevnikov, *Stalin's Great Science: The Times and Adventures of Soviet Physicists* (River Edge, NJ: Imperial College Press, 2004); and Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[95] In his characteristic polemic style, Medvedev concluded, "The anti-inbreeding campaign continued until 1954 when, . . . after a careful study of American experience, a resolution was passed directing quick adoption of this progressive methodology. . . . Had there not been the unproved, unfounded, tendentious, and simply ignorant propaganda of the Lysenkoites, the method could have been adopted" before World War II, resulting in millions of tons of additional grain annually. Medvedev, *Rise and Fall of T. D Lysenko*, 181.

when double-cross hybrids took hold in American fields thanks to the promotion of men such as Garst.[96]

Under Khrushchev, Lysenko's power to further his theories ebbed and resurged, but supporters of genetics overcame them only by securing his final defeat in conjunction with Khrushchev's own fall from power in 1964. By the middle of the 1950s, double-cross hybrids had boosted American yields, while hybrid corn spread to other countries as one of the high-yielding varieties (HYVs) that sparked the Green Revolution.[97] American farmers used double-cross hybrids extensively, and in Iowa almost exclusively, demonstrating potential yields at much as 30 percent higher than alternatives. In 1955, the Soviet delegation devoted itself to studying Americans' mastery of the underlying science, the production of hybrids, and the use of the seeds because Soviet leaders could no longer afford to ignore the technology. This was particularly damaging to Lysenko, given his longstanding claim to authority based on linking his theories with production, rather than pure science.

Earlier in 1955, supporters of genetics aimed an outburst of criticism at Lysenko, calling on party authorities to rescind the official endorsement his theories had enjoyed since a decisive meeting of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences in 1948, and to remove him from that organization's presidency. A commission established by the Central Committee to investigate Lysenko and the academy found "substantial shortcomings and mistakes" in the affairs of both. It especially faulted Lysenko's dictatorial control over the editorial boards of academic journals, as well as the biology instruction students in higher education received,

---

[96] Joravsky, *Lysenko Affair*, 285–86. In addition, Henry A. Wallace, vice-president under Franklin D. Roosevelt (1941–1945), had spurred this development in the pages of his family's journal, *Wallace's Farmer*, and later founded the Hi-Bred Corn Company, the forerunner of the later Pioneer Hi-Bred and today's DuPont Pioneer. Garst began his career as a local distributor of Hi-Bred seeds in the early 1930s.

[97] In comparison to wheat and rice, double-cross hybrids contributed less because small-scale farmers could not annually reproduce the seeds themselves and frequently lacked an annual cash flow sufficient to purchase new seeds. In isolated cases, corn spread widely; for example, it fostered the highly capitalized agriculture of postcolonial Rhodesia, today's Zimbabwe. There, scientists developed double-cross hybrids effective on capital-intensive, white-settler–owned farms on the best land, neglecting the needs of Africans' smaller, mostly subsistence farms. See: McCann, *Maize and Grace*, especially chapter 7, "Breeding SR-52: The Politics of Science and Race in Southern Africa," 140–73.

which did not "demonstrate the achievements of Soviet and *foreign* researchers [emphasis added] in the field of biology."[98] This charge stands out because Lysenko had led the campaign in the late 1940s against ideas or scientists from abroad, which he denounced as "bourgeois" and "formalist," in contrast to the "materialist" and "Marxist-Leninist" labels he gave his own theories. In 1956, Khrushchev ordered the party to curb Lysenko's administrative and editorial duties, an effort to combat brazen abuse of power; nonetheless, no one publicly renounced his authority in scientific matters.[99]

Khrushchev had spoken favorably of *hybrid* corn before the October 1955 report by the delegation, but not about double-cross hybrids specifically; Soviet experts therefore had to demonstrate that American-style hybrids were superior to the intervarietal ones favored on Soviet farms to that point. Khrushchev satisfied their demands by providing funding and institutional backing for the research, a signal of disfavor toward Lysenko and his supporters that forced them, after reading the shifting currents of politics, to cease opposing hybrid corn. As quickly as 1958, Lysenko and his faction returned to attacking opponents, but double-cross hybrids remained immune. He reclaimed editorships of academic journals and attempted to resurrect his former methods—demonization and demagoguery—for old purposes, but he did not equal his past triumphs under Stalin.

In their written account and oral reports, the delegation's experts evaluated agricultural education and the applied sciences in the US with special focus on hybrid corn. Matskevich and B. P. Sokolov, the delegation's corn-breeding expert, advocated adopting the double-cross hybrids because American researchers investigated them at the exclusion of intervarietal hybrids, and because Soviet scientists had the requisite knowledge. They therefore appealed to Khrushchev for official support and funding for research like that in the US.[100] Sokolov and

---

[98] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 33, l. 2.

[99] Pollock, "From *Partiinost'* to *Nauchnost'*," 109.

[100] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 89, l. 62.

Matskevich based their appeal on the extra production Soviet farms could expect as a result of their research, rather than on genetics' own value as a theoretical science. To emphasize the point, Sokolov claimed that double-cross hybrids accounted for approximately 75 percent of the extraordinary growth in American corn harvests in the preceding two decades.[101]

Given Sokolov's interest in proving hybrid corn's importance, reversing decades of official hostility, and securing support for research, he argued his case on the grounds that the USSR possessed the means to produce the double-cross hybrids. He began by noting that Russians had long experimented with creating hybrids. He then explained that he personally had worked on hybrid corn since 1930 and, although the Americans had bounded forward in practical applications of hybridization during that time, the Soviet Union had the basis to quickly match them. "It is therefore incorrect," he asserted, "to concede hybridization to the Americans."[102] The American advantage lay in using the technology: "They have only employed this biological phenomenon, organizing very large hybrid-seed farms, which sell only the hybrid seeds to farmers." Soviet research used the same knowledge and began with the same genetic lines.[103] Nonetheless, it had produced few advances in production yields because of poor implementation. In the 1930s and 1940s, instead of following the trail blazed by pioneers in the US, the Soviet Union had developed less productive intervarietal hybrids, ignoring double-cross hybrids and leaving the geneticists—including Sokolov—who developed them on the sidelines. Sokolov indicated that problems in putting the hybrids into practice had served as the ammunition for Lysenko's attacks. "How do we explain," Sokolov asked in his presentation to Khrushchev, "the fact that such a beneficial measures is carried out so weakly here?" He emphasized disagreements among the experts favoring the double-cross hybrids and those against them during the time of experimental hybridization in the USSR. He then outlined, in

[101] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, ll. 130–31.

[102] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 131.

[103] Joravsky, *Lysenko Affair*, 289-91.

cautious and conciliatory terms, how Lysenko and company had asserted that simple hybrids solved Soviet problems because they were easy to produce and transmitted their improved yields to second and subsequent generations of seeds. Charges that the double-cross hybrids' apparently superior yields in the US were fictive, Sokolov argued, did not stand up to scrutiny. Managers of state and collective farms, "listening to the opinion of the scientists who argued for the second and third generations [i.e. intervarietal hybrids], considered production of [double-cross] hybrids unnecessary and therefore [that kind of] hybridization did not develop here."[104] This episode illustrates how the centralized authority of the party and Soviet government might hinder useful innovations by ignoring or even condemning them. By the same token, official support brought the necessary resources to master the technology.

Responding to Sokolov's appeal for backing, Khrushchev endorsed the geneticists, at least as far as their work concerned hybrid corn. Possessing the required knowledge, specialists needed funds and institutional resources that only the leader's patronage could grant. "I am convinced," Khrushchev stated in response to Sokolov's proposals, "that 99 percent of what Comrade Sokolov reported here, he knew prior to the trip to America. The benefit of the trip is that he personally saw [the technologies] there and became troubled by the fact that we had not developed them, even though we had the knowledge."[105] He praised the geneticist, adding, "Comrade Sokolov has spoken well and drawn correct conclusions. Now we must set this matter in motion with his help."[106] He ordered his aides to prepare a proposal specifying where and how to produce double-cross hybrid seeds. They soon returned with a policy designating research institutes, selection stations, and state farms to carry out the necessary work.[107]

Double-cross hybrids demonstrated the influence of American practice as a model, as

---

[104] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 131.

[105] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 154.

[106] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 151.

[107] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 136, ll. 45–58.

well as the USSR's participation in worldwide adoption of hybrid corn, especially the most modern double-cross hybrids. Furthermore, it suggests both change in Khrushchev-era policies, and the continuity linking them to Stalin-era precedents. With Khrushchev's approval, avenues of inquiry that Lysenko's power had previously blocked suddenly opened. Despite these setbacks, Lysenko remained powerful and influential.

For the USSR to efficiently embrace double-cross hybrids, it had to invest time, money, and resources to develop infrastructure and procure the required equipment. Following precedent set during Stalin's industrialization drives of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the USSR imported this technology from the US. The delegation preached to Soviet leaders the importance of seed calibration, and of the specialized companies—Pioneer, DeKalb, Garst & Thomas, and others—that performed the component tasks of producing, harvesting, drying, sorting, treating, packaging, and distributing the production seeds.[108] Although not blind to the potential profit, American companies—Garst's firm in particular—sold the technology in part to contribute to global stability through food security. In early 1956, Garst arranged for the sale of double-cross hybrid seeds, the parental genetic lines, and the machinery to process Soviet-produced hybrid seeds, epitomizing the transfer of practical technology from capitalist to socialist hands. For their part, Soviet leaders sought a technological improvement in production and labor productivity, problems that had rendered earlier Soviet corn cultivation an extravagantly labor-intensive endeavor, and which industrial methods were suited to solve.

This sale of technology facilitated Soviet efforts to master a process they called calibration, which necessitated investment in machinery to economize on labor, the trade-off typical of industrial farming. The procedure required an automated factory that dried the raw seeds to preserve them, sorted them according to size and shape, treated them with fungicide to protect them, and packaged them in "fractions" of seeds of the same size and shape. Sorting the seeds enabled the "square-cluster method" of planting and cultivating, for which Khrushchev

[108] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 89, l. 135.

unerringly advocated. It saved labor once the seeds reached the farmer by permitting a mechanical planter to distribute seeds not in a continuous row, as is common today, but instead in clusters of two or three plants separated by a prescribed distance from other clusters on both lateral and horizontal axes of the field. So that a regular number of seeds went through the planter's regulator and into each cluster, the seeds had to be uniform in size and shape. By distributing the seeds in rows on both axes, with clusters of plants at the corners of empty squares, this method allowed farmers to use tractor-drawn cultivators to quickly and efficiently eliminate weeds traveling in both directions, rather than only one, as in a row of plants. This replaced manual labor with machinery in many tasks, epitomizing modern approaches to farming. Capital investments in machines, transport, and organization offered higher yields and substantial savings in time and labor once the crop was in the ground. Tellingly, however, at the moment when Khrushchev prescribed this method for row crops in the USSR, American farmers began to abandon it because increasingly available chemical herbicides for killing weeds made the squares superfluous and the extra labor they required unproductive.

The Soviet delegation to the United States inaugurated expanded interactions between the USSR and its rivals. A parallel delegation visited Great Britain at the same time. Groups traveled to France, other Western European countries, and nations in the Eastern bloc. Scientists, engineers, and other specialists augmented their knowledge of theoretical and practical advances outside the USSR by accessing literature on agricultural science and technology published in Western Europe and North America, which began to make its way onto the pages of specialist newspapers and journals in the USSR. Before 1953, the antiforeign campaigns of the late-Stalin period and the rejection of foreign knowledge dictated by the power of Lysenko had bottled up such information. Subsequent contacts fostered a renewed flow of knowledge. The quantity of technical journals expanded; a journal dedicated to corn, entitled simply *Kukuruza*, appeared in 1955. It, along with the USSR Ministry of Agriculture's daily newspaper, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo*, frequently featured summaries, reviews, and translations of

foreign technical literature. They concentrated on developments in industrial farming and encouraged mechanization, electrification, laborsaving devices, improved breeding, and a host of other techniques associated with American practices.

The Soviet experts who traveled to the US had possessed familiarity with corn and industrial farming prior to departing. They returned, however, with convictions that corn could and should constitute an integral component of a progressive, highly mechanized system of farming. Matskevich, Sokolov, Shevchenko, and the others had contributed to Khrushchev's corn crusade before the summer of 1955. They did not bring back corn itself or a newfound belief in it, but rather the inspiration to transform it from a crop requiring vast amounts of manual labor to achieve modest yields into one benefitting from advances in machine building, chemistry, genetics, and management practices that scaled up yields while reducing production costs. The political leaders, with Khrushchev at their head, stood well-disposed toward these methods because industrial farming principles had captured Soviet theory and existed in limited areas of practice as far back as the 1920s. The delegation of 1955 observed an American system founded on familiar tenets, but embodying them more thoroughly. Its members returned to the USSR with their convictions confirmed about the proper path forward; their findings, moreover, reinforced the biases of the leader whose opinion mattered most: Khrushchev.

* * *

Although later witnessing American industrial farming practices for himself, Khrushchev first became acquainted with their proponents when he met Garst in 1955, a friendship that continued throughout his decade in power. Introducing himself to the delegation in 1955, Garst whisked Matskevich, Sokolov, and Shevchenko away from the other members and to his farm in Coon Rapids, Iowa. There they inspected the machines, hybrids, insecticides, herbicides, fertilizers, irrigation, and other methods used in its industrial farming operations.[109] Garst

[109] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 88, l. 10. See also: Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 372.

thereby secured an invitation to the USSR and, eventually, to an audience with Khrushchev.[110] Each loquacious showman found in the other a kindred spirit. From their first meeting in 1955, Garst pushed Khrushchev, already committed to corn, to adopt the latest industrial methods for cultivating the crop and using it as feed. Although he did not offer the technologies for free, Garst demonstrated evangelical zeal for spreading the system he had helped to develop. He believed that this package of technologies provided the only means for averting the global food-production crisis many predicted. He was in some ways correct: the threat of that crisis receded into the future as advances transformed farming in industrialized countries and then in the Third World. Garst thus mixed humanitarian and commercial motivations, transcending barriers between Soviet socialism and American capitalism to spread technologies both he and his willing Soviet partners deemed value-neutral. Garst returned repeatedly to the USSR throughout the Khrushchev period, always heralding the latest in industrial farming and delivering practical knowledge about corn, livestock raising, and other methods for boosting production. Ensuring these principles flowed from Iowa to the world, Garst also imparted his knowledge to receptive audiences in Eastern Europe, for example in Hungary and Romania. He cultivated extensive contacts with specialists in those countries, beginning with stops he made there following his journey to the USSR in the fall of 1955.[111] Proselytizing in Eastern Europe, he supported Khrushchev's ambitions to spread favored methods where corn had been a staple, such as in Romania and Hungary, and to propagate the crop in new lands, particularly Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the German Democratic Republic.[112]

---

[110] Harold Lee's biography of Garst, his father-in-law, includes a detailed narrative of this trip, as well as of subsequent visits to Eastern Europe and the USSR. See: Lee, *Roswell Garst*, 186–90.

[111] Ibid., 190–96.

[112] Naum Jasny's economic analysis of Khrushchev's agricultural programs includes extensive consideration of corn in the Soviet Union, which he compared to North American farmers' successes. Even in countries such as Hungary and Italy where farmers have long grown corn, he found conditions less than the ideal represented by Iowa. He concluded that this unwelcoming climate, in tandem with the inferior technical methods found on farms of the USSR and its satellites, ensured lower yields. Jasny, *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*, 116–38.

From the corn campaign's start, Khrushchev pressured socialist allies to adopt machines and methods favored in the USSR. In a private conversation with his agricultural advisors in March 1955, he detailed his vision for a concurrent campaign in Eastern Europe. "This is a colossal breakthrough," he enthused. "It's difficult to even imagine the results. . . . If we get the Hungarians and the Romanians, who are now corn-growers [*kukuruzniki*], to harvest at waxy maturity, then they will overflow with grain and silage, but right now they have nothing to feed their livestock."[113] "Waxy maturity" means that the grain is almost mature, yet not completely dry. Harvesting at this stage allowed mixing the green plant mass and the grain to produce a greater volume of feed, suitable for preserving for winter as slightly fermented silage edible for cattle and sheep. Khrushchev encouraged this approach, rather than growing corn only for grain, and shipped seeds to Poland, Romania, and the German Democratic Republic.[114] Reports from Soviet agricultural attachés noted encouraging increases in cropland devoted to corn: In 1956, the attaché in Warsaw confirmed that Polish farmers had doubled that area to 200,000 hectares.[115] A cable from Romania documented the Bucharest attaché's attendance at a demonstration of American machinery arranged by Garst on a nearby state farm.[116] However well intentioned, this advice turned sour by the time of Khrushchev's ouster. By 1964, he had alienated partners by persistently goading them about corn and methods for cultivating it. As a result, his former comrades condemned his condescending treatment of East European partners, especially an incident in which he berated Romanian leaders for lacking devotion to corn.[117]

---

[113] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 64, l. 32.

[114] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 75, ll. 49–52 and RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 78, ll. 97–103.

[115] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 130, l. 31.

[116] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 130, ll. 63–67.

[117] Artizov, ed., *Nikita Khrushchev*, 199. That incident occurred in 1963: Khrushchev had criticized Romanian leaders, including senior leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, for insufficient commitment to corn, despite the crop's longstanding status as a peasant staple in the country.

In September 1959, Khrushchev traveled on a mission to build goodwill in the United States and to strengthen peace. Prior to meeting President Dwight D. Eisenhower at Camp David, Khrushchev captivated American journalists and broadcasters, spoke to Congressional and business leaders, visited factories, and toured Hollywood. He stopped at Garst's farm in Iowa. Khrushchev's apparently boundless enthusiasm for America mirrored Americans' curiosity about the Soviet leader, as evidenced by the media attention he attracted. The conversation between Garst and Khrushchev occurred amid the crowd newspapermen, photographers, television cameras, and bystanders. In retirement, Khrushchev recalled, "It reminded me of what Prokop, the gamekeeper on our shooting preserve in Ukraine, used to say when I asked him how the hunting looked. 'Well, Comrade Prokop, any ducks today?' 'Ducks everywhere, Comrade Khrushchev,' he'd answer in Ukrainian. 'Ducks as far as the eyes can see—more ducks than shit.'"[118]

Khrushchev's trip to America also dominated the Soviet media, prompting publication of a book, *Litsom k litsu s Amerikoi* (Face to Face with America) chronicling the leader's meeting with the US. It addressed a general audience, but it also announced the party line on agricultural policy.[119] The book emphasized industrial agriculture's contributions to American abundance, but also highlighted social and economic crisis churning under the surface of the outwardly prosperous capitalist society. In Iowa, Khrushchev visited a factory belonging to Deere & Company, the manufacturer of tractors and implements. There he spoke in favor of peaceful competition based on food production, assuring both his American audience and Soviet citizens

---

[118] Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament,* ed. and trans. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 396–97. The recent English translation of the comprehensive Russian text captures less of Khrushchev's humor and idiomatic speech: "As they say in our country, there were so many of them, some you could see, and some you couldn't. . . . When [Prokop] wanted to emphasize that the number of ducks on the marshes was like a countless multitude, he would use a Ukrainian expression that means, 'They're everywhere, like manure.'" *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 3:138.

[119] M. A. Kharlamov and O. Vadeev, eds., *Litsom k litsu s Amerikoi: Rasskaz o poezdke N. S. Khrushcheva v SShA, 15–27 sentiabria 1959 goda* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1960). The book brought together contributions by a dozen influential authors, including Khrushchev's son-in-law, A. N. Adzhubei, and the First Secretary's personal advisors Shevchenko, O. A. Troianovskii, and G. T. Shuiskii.

at home that his slogan, "to catch up with and overtake America," demonstrated the USSR's peaceful intentions. He promised that this represented "a much better competition than a buildup of hydrogen bombs and all types of weapons. Let there be more corn and meat, but absolutely no hydrogen weapons!"[120]

The book chronicling Khrushchev's sojourn also encouraged Soviet readers to consider themselves part of the struggle to feed the hungry and save the world. His conversation with Garst ranged over many subjects, with emphasis on Khrushchev's interest in corn cultivation, raising livestock, and the industrial methods his American friend employed on his farm. Oddly enough, Garst first invoked the themes of peaceful cooperation and food's global importance as a guarantor of security. The Soviet publication reported that he expressed willingness "to give all that is innovative to the Soviet Union. Let the USSR share it with China, India, and other countries, so that there are no hungry people in the world, so that there are no wars, and so there is peace on earth and friendship among peoples."[121] In publishing this, the Soviet authorities endorsed Garst's statements, which coincided with the views that the American showman consistently espoused on the subject.[122]

Khrushchev habitually enthused about development projects using industrial farming principles such as irrigation schemes to expand production at home and abroad.[123] Speaking to the Central Committee in 1961, he raved about their potential to feed countries in danger of food shortages. "Irrigation will allow us to take a new step toward intensive management of

---

[120] Ibid., 334.

[121] Ibid., 340.

[122] See: Lee, *Roswell Garst*, especially chapters 7–9. Those detail Garst's partnerships with socialist countries, but also with experts in El Salvador from the mid 1950s to the mid 1970s.

[123] Scott explains that the irrigation and similar development projects that proliferated in the post–World War II period drew inspiration from the United States and New Deal programs, especially the Tennessee Valley Authority. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 224. Cullather explores this process in detail. Cullather, *Hungry World*. The Soviet Union, moreover, had in the interwar period carried through its own projects. The first, on the Dnieper River in Ukraine, began construction in 1927 and relied on American expertise. Ball, *Imagining America*, 123–23; and Graham, *Ghost of the Executed Engineer*, 50–55.

agriculture," he argued, not only in the USSR, where the process was underway, but also in the Third World. In contrast to the "bourgeois economists" who predicted overpopulation and malnutrition, he envisioned plenty: "If the achievements of science and technology are properly utilized, then the potential for food production is simply limitless." He then took the case of India as a template, suggesting that electric power, water pumps, and pipelines would permit farmers to make the land blossom. In the same breath, he touted the benefits Soviet farms could expect from applying industrial methods: they might allow average farms to equal the yields achieved previously by only the best, thereby more than doubling average yields of grain.[124] Khrushchev praised industrial methods' virtues to anyone who would listen; for example, he created a scandal during an official visit to Egypt in early 1964.[125] The Egyptian representative, Mohamed Heikal, later described how Khrushchev dismissed his country's development efforts. "I tried to explain Egyptian methods of agriculture," Heikal wrote, "but Khrushchev broke in: 'This is all nonsense, you're wasting your time. Do you know what you ought to do? Chemical agriculture is the answer.'"[126]

* * *

Khrushchev paused the corn crusade temporarily, when efforts in the 1955, 1956, and 1957 growing seasons yielded less than he had hoped. He returned to it with renewed vigor after 1958, augmented by a renewed emphasis on the industrial ideal, embodied by more and better tractors, chemicals, hybrid seeds, and the other advances Garst advocated. These measures informed the sections on agricultural policy in Khrushchev's Seven-Year Plan, adopted at the

---

[124] N. S. Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), 296.

[125] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 609.

[126] Mohamed Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 132.

"extraordinary" Twenty-first Party Congress in early 1959.[127] The initial results of the Sixth Five-Year Plan, adopted at the Twentieth Congress in 1956, had not matched Khrushchev's ambitions. Unchallenged in his power after the crisis of June 1957, he set targets for the new plan's final year, 1965, representing significant advances over gains already achieved under his guidance. As it happened, the feeling of potential abundance reached its height in 1958, but at the Twenty-first Congress the path seemed open to Khrushchev's vision of industrial agriculture: capital investment in mechanization, electrification, irrigation, synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides promised to raise yields of corn, not to mention other major crops.

Addressing the Central Committee prior to the congress, Khrushchev evaluated the results of the previous five years, stated the convictions shaping the new plan, and proposed measures for continuing to increase output while lowering production costs. He demanded that Soviet farms apply the scientific knowledge, management practices, and training they already possessed, not to mention that they improve corn yields.[128] The Soviet Union had benefitted again from Garst's aid: in 1958, he invited Soviet specialists to his farm in Iowa to work side-by-side with him, his sons, and his hired hands for the full agricultural year. At the plenum, corngrower A. V. Gitalov related his experiences as a machine operator on Garst's farm, where he and his fellow Soviet specialists had mastered industrial farming methods.[129] Evaluating Gitalov's report, Khrushchev freely acknowledged the benefits of Garst's invitation. "Traveling there to work, Comrade Gitalov learned much from Garst. We thank him. [Foreign detractors] always chide us communists, saying that we only criticize the capitalists. And now, as you can see, we thank the farmer-capitalist [Garst] for the profitable exchange."[130] The methods Gitalov had learned allowed the USSR to use machines and other laborsaving devices more effectively.

---

[127] The facts and figures of the plan can be found in: "Kontrol'nye tsifry razvitiia narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR na 1959–1965 gody," *Pravda* (February 8, 1959): 1-10.

[128] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 3:439.

[129] For more, see: Lee, *Roswell Garst*, 219.

[130] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 3:442.

Khrushchev illustrated his point by calling attention to experiments on a collective farm in Russia's Voronezh oblast, where N. F. Manukovskii had raised 200 hectares of corn without any manual labor.[131] By contrast, predominant practices required manual labor to calibrate the seeds, cultivate the fields, and harvest the grain. Although Khrushchev did not highlight the influence of American technologies on Manukovskii's work, he had used machines and technologies, such as the factory-calibrated seeds, that Soviet engineers had mastered because of exposure to American practices—or direct transfer of the technology.[132]

When the Central Committee met in December 1959 to review the first year of the new Seven-Year Plan, Khrushchev again called attention to the most modern corngrowing methods and technologies. He praised the large corn harvests achieved in Kalinovka, his native village in Kursk oblast and home to a model collective farm thanks to his patronage. He sounded the attack, however, against the oblast leaders, who had ordered the collective farmers to produce hybrid seeds themselves, a task requiring a more favorable climate and technical skill the farmers lacked.

> Why do that? That stage has been passed by. Don't get clever, comrades [i.e. the oblast's leaders]. Don't demonstrate your backwardness. Seeds should be raised only on seed-production farms. Take American practices as an example. Not every farmer there raises seed corn. He receives it from a company specializing in seed production. But here, some want to raise corn for silage and also produce seeds on their farms. This is primitive production [*kustarnichestvo*, lit. "handicrafting," non-industrial production].[133] This must not be done. We live in the age of specialization. Farms must be specialized.[134]

Citing American precedents, Khrushchev asserted not only the superiority of the high-yielding hybrids, but also that the technology illustrated the specialization so critical to putting the

---

[131] Ibid., 3:421.

[132] The affinity between Manukovskii's methods and American inspirations emerges clearly in a detailed report the Voronezh oblast party committee sent the Ministry of Agriculture and the Central Committee in Moscow. GARF, f. A-259, op. 7, d. 8048, ll. 9–13.

[133] The term "handicraft" in this pejorative sense has roots in Bolshevik usage: Lenin employed the term to denote the opposite of the large-scale production that industrial capitalism developed and socialist societies, in his Marxist vision, would appropriate.

[134] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 4:96.

industrial ideal into practice.

As Khrushchev and his allies argued for the importance of corn and industrial farming technologies, they professed a commitment to international cooperation despite renewed Cold War tensions. Postwar conflicts over the city of Berlin remained unresolved, straining a relationship that grew worse when Soviet forces downed American Francis Gary Powers's spy plane in May 1960, and still further during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Nonetheless, the Soviet leaders maintained the doctrine of peaceful coexistence and competition. Contacts temporarily halted, but they signaled willingness to renew them, an effort likely reflecting their desire to proclaim the USSR's peace-loving nature in domestic and foreign propaganda. *Kukuruza: Dlia obmena opyta dveri shiroko otkryty* (Corn: The Door for Exchange Is Wide Open), the book A. S. Shevchenko published in 1961, demonstrated that despite deteriorating relations, Soviet leaders looked to nurture contacts with the US, the benchmark in the competition of economic systems and an inspiration for Soviet efforts.[135] Shevchenko declared that the USSR, as the book's subtitle indicated, had "doors wide open for exchange," while extolling the Soviet system's superior principles in terms similar to those he and his fellow delegates had used in 1955. Confronting Western notions about the advantages of private ownership and capitalist development, he praised collective farms and Khrushchev's plans to ride corn to victory in the race to provide abundance. Attacking the American alternative, he charged, "The restrictions the capitalist system places on agricultural development are well known, as well as how it limits creative initiative, ruins farmers, and drives many of them into the ranks of the poor."[136] He reassured Soviet readers that America had succeeded not thanks to private property, which created economic and social inequality, but on the strength of corn and industrial farming. He continued, "It is not the private farm, but rather corn, that has helped the

---

[135] A. S. Shevchenko, *Kukuruza: Dlia obmena opyta dveri shiroko otkryty* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sel'skokhoziaistvennoi literatury, zhurnalov i plakatov, 1961).

[136] Ibid., 346–47.

USA raise its grain production and, as a result, improve animal husbandry. But corn does not serve the capitalist system alone." This conclusion exonerated Soviet collective and state farms of charges about inherent shortcomings, blaming inadequate production on struggles to master technology for growing corn. Shevchenko reassured his readers that the crop would provide equal riches once the Soviet Union had learned to care it.

Even when the Seven-Year Plan proved insufficient to realizing his dreams, Khrushchev recapitulated his vision for expanding production to reach the longstanding goal "to catch up with and overtake the United States." His plans to raise Soviet productivity by using industrial farming featured in the Third Party Program that appeared in late 1961, enumerating the steps necessary to ensure that communism would be a reality by 1980. Although famous for renewed attacks on Stalin, the Twenty-second Party Congress ratified this program and the policies established to reach its targets. Boosting yields per hectare and output per ruble of investment remained central to the strategy.[137] The sweeping plan promised to adapt crops suitable to the various climatic regions, improve the qualifications of collective farm leaders, increase synthetic fertilizer production, and decentralize economic planning. It categorized these measures as "intensification."

Intensification in essence meant industrial agriculture, methods that remained central through 1964 and beyond. At the time of the congress, Khrushchev reiterated the connection among corn, livestock, and living standards. In place of singular miraculous solutions, such as corn, he emphasized interconnected reforms to how the USSR planned, used technology, selected crops, and administered farms. Not the sole reason for American farmers' success, corn formed only part of the larger package of measures that was the "secret" of their productivity.[138] This theme remained throughout the last three years he held power: speaking to the Central

---

[137] *Programma kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo soiuza: Priniata XXII s"ezdom KPSS* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1964), 133.

[138] N. S. Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva*, vol. 8 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1964), 27.

Committee in February 1964, he faced the consequences of the crop failures that forced the USSR to purchase grain abroad in 1963 to stave off crisis. Despite queues for bread that delegitimized his rule, he remained optimistic that intensification offered a path forward, and that the USSR required corn. Enormous potential remained in machines, of which farms needed more and better. Investing in the chemical industry would bring inexpensive synthetic fertilizer, herbicides, and insecticides, which had revolutionized agriculture in the US and beyond, to Soviet fields in greater quantities than before.[139] To illustrate, Khrushchev had reported in July 1963 that American farmers applied 35 million metric tons on 118 million hectares of cropland (a ratio of 1 ton for every 3.37 hectares), while in the USSR those figures were 20 million and 218 million (a ratio of 1:10.9).[140] He had proposed a radical expansion of that figure, boasting to US Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman that year that the USSR aimed to produce 100 million tons.[141] Intensification offered "the true path to increasing productivity of animal husbandry" by enabling "high yields of feed crops, especially corn and sugar beets."[142] European and American farmers had developed these solutions over the course of decades. Khrushchev gave the USSR just seven years to match that achievement.[143] Even after ten years of wrestling with the rigid command-administrative system, he remained confident that the socialist system could achieve the extraordinary. In the US, the threat of destitution drove some farmers to work ever harder and others to become wage laborers in thrall to capitalist farmers. In the USSR, by contrast, "farmworkers labor for themselves and society. They are paid for the amount and quality of their labor."[144]

---

[139] Ibid., 8:399.

[140] Ibid., 8:32.

[141] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 607.

[142] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 8:399.

[143] Khrushchev explained that according to Garst, in 1955 the USSR was at a technical level of American practice of thirty years prior; by 1964, they had closed that gap to only eight years. Ibid., 8:411.

[144] Ibid., 8:399.

Khrushchev's promises encouraged popular expectations his agricultural policies did not satisfy, highlighting inconsistencies implicit in the multiple official narratives about the US and providing room for competing counterimages. Soviet leaders proved unable to meet demands they had raised, exacerbating the problem of managing some citizens' comparisons between the Soviet society and the American other.[145] In 1961, a disgruntled Soviet voter in Perm oblast wrote a note illustrating this failure, although it was only an anecdotal example of the critical remarks a tiny minority of Soviet voters scribbled on their ineffectual ballots. "Elect who you'll elect," the voter wrote, "but there is no meat, no fish. We say we've caught up to America, but why is it necessary to catch up to them when they live 'in poverty'?"[146] Having applied the technologies its leaders found in the US for several years, the USSR had neither matched America nor satisfied its citizens' demands. Although, for a few years in the late 1950s, it appeared to make good on Khrushchev's promises, the USSR ultimately did not achieve enough, a failure that contributed to his rising unpopularity and his former comrades' decision to force him from power.

Khrushchev's plans to transform Soviet farming in the late 1950s and early 1960s demonstrate the high-modernist philosophy shared by all Soviet leaders. Khrushchev's proposals echoed those G. M. Malenkov made in 1953 and 1954, when the two men vied for power. Malenkov had called in August 1953 for greater investment and concentrating on machines and synthetic fertilizer to boost production by raising productivity per hectare.[147] By contrast, Khrushchev favored extensive growth that simply brought more hectares under the plow, as in the case of the Virgin Lands campaign. He trumpeted intensive methods only once he

---

[145] Rósa Magnúsdóttir, "Keeping Up Appearances: How the Soviet State Failed to Control Popular Attitudes Toward the United States of America, 1945–1959" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006).

[146] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 14, d. 187, l. 49.

[147] "Rech' Predsedatelia Soveta Ministrov Soiuza SSR tovarishcha G. M. Malenkova," *Pravda* (August 8, 1953): 2.

had shunted Malenkov aside and considered his own authority secure. Arguing that Khrushchev's policies changed direction around 1958 and embraced "full and complete intensification" only in late 1963, historian I. E. Zelenin suggests that these transitions demonstrate the "contradictory character" of Khrushchev's shifts in policy.[148] In later emphasizing intensive methods, however, Khrushchev did not have to change his convictions, cynically appropriating a defeated rival's program or tacitly admitting the failure of earlier policies. He did adopt the terminology of "intensification" relatively late, but the policies had begun to germinate long before. Historian Elena Zubkova shows that Khrushchev had the courage of conviction in his struggle with Malenkov. Khrushchev believed not only that he was best suited to managing agricultural policy, but that his proposals offered the quickest and most efficient solution to the food crisis, while Malenkov's suggestions seemed cautious and gradual.[149] Khrushchev began to emphasize industrial methods not because his alternative extensive policies failed—they were in fact among his most successful—but because those initial efforts had been a step on the path to intensification, offering to free settled regions to plant corn. Even those extensive programs drew on a common set of high-modernist, or promethean beliefs that he and Malenkov shared. The two leaders selected proposals from the same playbook, disagreeing only on the manner of implementing their common doctrine.

* * *

To conclude, Soviet efforts to adopt industrial methods and expand corn cultivation show how the USSR developed not in insolation behind an iron curtain, but within a global web of ideas, technologies, and practices. The industrial farming methods that Khrushchev and his advisors observed abroad governed the goals he established and his policies for pursuing them, but so too did previous Soviet experiences. Beginning in the 1920s, Soviet ideology possessed a

---

[148] Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 16.

[149] Zubkova, "Rivalry with Malenkov," 76–81.

special affinity for industrial agriculture, in keeping with the promethean current in Bolshevism. Faith that Soviet socialist enterprises would master "value neutral" technologies invented under capitalism spurred interaction between American and Soviet practices in industry. Similar exchanges in agriculture demonstrated what Fitzgerald terms "the transfer mentality" characteristic of adherents the industrial ideal in agriculture. Applying those principles to farming only infrequently under Stalin, the USSR responded to Khrushchev's advocacy for them. The 1955 delegation and subsequent exchanges facilitated adoption and adaptation of American technologies. Because they considered state socialism a superior social and economic system, they believed that by applying those techniques under socialist conditions they might make enormous gains in productivity and living standards.

I do not suggest that Soviet agriculture constituted part of the Green Revolution. The concepts governing agricultural policy in the USSR instead reproduced technologies that impelled the industrial ideal in the US. During the postwar period, state actors and nongovernmental agencies such as the Rockefeller Foundation put components of this suite of technologies in the hands of Third World farmers. Expanded harvests depended on new high-yielding varieties of staple grains, including wheat, rice, and corn. A designation first applied only in the late 1960s, this Green Revolution furthermore relied on irrigation, chemicals, fertilizers, educational outreach, machines, scientific knowledge, and the capital—in the form of credit—necessary to acquire those innovations. The distinct Soviet version of industrial farming, using the same technologies, achieved ascendency under Khrushchev. In chronological terms, the Soviet fascination with these methods predated their spread to the Third World. Moreover, the USSR stood aloof from the government programs and nongovernmental organizations that, in the postwar period, shepherded these technologies spread in Latin America, Asia, and to a smaller degree in Africa. Instead, Soviet practice shared common roots with the Green Revolution's American sources, developing as a related but distinct phenomenon contingent upon conditions peculiar to Soviet-style socialism.

Industrial farming principles remained in place following Khrushchev's exit from the Kremlin.[150] Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the USSR continued to emulate world trends in farming practices, as foreign observers noted the capital-intensive industrial methods that drove the system.[151] Soviet officials and publications labeled Soviet agricultural practices "*agropromyshlennyi*" (lit. "agroindustrial"). Building on the foundations constructed by Khrushchev, the leadership under L. I. Brezhnev expanded investment, leading to what one analyst called "agroindustrial integration."[152] The results suggest that the wager on industrial farming achieved only modest success, falling short even of the restrained hopes of the technocratic Brezhnev leadership. In years with favorable and unfavorable weather, harvests surpassed the historical norms of the Stalin and Khrushchev years. Maximum yields rose from 1.11 metric tons per hectare (1955–60), already a substantial improvement over the Stalin period, to 1.85 tons per hectare twenty years later (1976–80). Yields in years with poor weather increased from .84 to 1.42 over the same period. Similarly, Soviet farms applied fertilizer in much greater quantities, with the total expanding severalfold between 1965 and 1980. Low in comparison with the US, the number of machines expanded, and capital investments in physical structures, irrigation, and drainage grew 9.5 percent between 1970 and 1975, and a further 7.3

---

[150] Although subject to omissions and distortions, Soviet statistics outline the major trends. Combined investment in agricultural production by the state and collective farms climbed from nearly 13 million rubles during the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1951–1955) to more than 24 million between 1956 and 1960, 38 million between 1961 and 1965, and almost 60 million in the five years leading to 1970. USSR Council of Ministers Central Statistical Department, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSSR: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Statistika, 1971), 359. These investments took the form of physical structures, electrification, irrigation, and power machinery. To illustrate, the Soviet machinery in terms of horsepower grew nearly fourfold between 1950 and 1965, and the number of physical tractors—threefold. Ibid., 373 and 378.

[151] Valentin Litvin, *The Soviet Agro-Industrial Complex: Structure and Performance* (Falls Church, VA: Delphic Associates, 1985).

[152] Robert Deutsch, *The Food Revolution in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 40. Grounded in Cold War-era political science, Deutsch conducted an insightful analysis of statistical trends. He concludes that despite significant investment, the USSR had not achieved high return on the resources plowed into agriculture. The remedy Soviet authorities tried to turn to in the 1980s was to utilize the existing capital more effectively.

percent between 1976 and 1980.[153]

Although Soviet agricultural planners chose industrial methods to drive their scheme for expanding production of corn and other crops, limits in their ability to implement these technologies curtailed productivity in practice. Anthropologist Arturo Warman argues that efforts to replicate American industrial corn production were impossible, because the model itself is unsustainable. He contends that the individuals and corporations who facilitated industrial agriculture in America expropriated and accumulated land, labor, and capital, to the detriment of communities, cultures, and the environment. These processes enabled the "miracle" of America's expanded production between 1920 and the 1970s.[154] Khrushchev attempted to earn similar dividends by applying the same technologies, supposing that socialist principles would diminish the negative effects. Success remained elusive, however, because of practical circumstances in the USSR, especially the climate and the destruction of rural communities and agricultural infrastructure wrought by collectivization and war. Because American industrial farming owed its success to particular historical, social, cultural, and environmental attributes, Soviet attempts to emulate its reliance on corn cultivation and industrial methods faced potentially insurmountable barriers. The USSR's struggles to fulfill Khrushchev's ambitions appear to confirm Warman's contention.

Nonetheless, Khrushchev's policies and efforts to put them into practice suggest that he and his supporters attempted to adopt industrial farming in a comprehensible, if not comprehensive, fashion. Specific policies suffered from crude design and poor implementation, as I show in the chapters that follow. By concluding that Khrushchev derived inspiration from the industrial ideal, however, I challenge historians' charges that his reforms failed because climatic or technological limitations that predetermined defeat. To understand why Soviet agriculture was unsuccessful in reaping the same higher yields American models achieved, this

---

[153] Ibid., 46–47.

[154] Warman, *Corn and Capitalism*, 193–96.

study follows Khrushchev's corn campaign into the spheres of policy and implementation, uncovering its fate among regional peculiarities, local climates, and prevailing bureaucratic practices.

CHAPTER 2

THE POLITICS OF CORN: KHRUSHCHEV'S AUTHORITY AND LAUNCHING THE CORN CRUSADE

As Stalin's successors began to discuss remedies for Soviet agriculture's failures in August 1953, Nikita Khrushchev used his expanding authority to extol corn's virtues. Gathering republic and oblast leaders, he pressed them to cultivate more corn and use innovative techniques. "Some of you sitting here," he commented, "perhaps even a majority, are thinking, 'Do you think you discovered America? We've been planting corn for many years.'" "And what do we get from it?" he asked. "We get small harvests." Enlarging them required new methods, he calculated: "It's all in the way you plant it."[1] Following experts' advice and American examples, Khrushchev advocated square-cluster planting, making it party doctrine throughout the ensuing decade.[2] He could not guarantee, however, that local and farm officials executed his orders. In the same remarks, Khrushchev recounted a trip to Ukraine's Izmaïl oblast, where the leaders of a district assured him they had given orders and held meetings to ensure that managers and specialists had mastered the method used by record-breaking corn-grower M. E. Ozernyi. Meeting one collective farm chairman, Khrushchev asked, "'Have you heard of Mark Ozernyi at all?' He had not. . . . Comrades, the lectures began and ended with Mark Ozernyi, during which time our dear chairman was sound asleep. Therefore, Mark Ozernyi went in one ear and out the other."[3]

Khrushchev considered square-cluster planting merely one measure necessary to sustain

---

[1] Tomilina, et al., eds., *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev*, 2:31.

[2] Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 300–2.

[3] Tomilina, et al., eds., *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev*, 2:41. When telling stories set in Ukraine, Khrushchev peppered his speech with Ukrainian words that differed from the Russian. In this case, he substituted the verb "*chuty*" for the Russian "*slyshat'*," "to hear."

his corn crusade. Interrogating how industrial farming principles became policy, this chapter examines the First Secretary's authority, or capacity to secure approval for each step in the process. Observers at the time saw few limits on it, especially after he confirmed his power by defeating rivals in June 1957. The "conflict school" challenged that view, perceiving in each subtle policy shift a sign of struggle hidden behind the leadership's façade of unity. In the 1970s, revisionist political scientists reversed that position, judging that no policy-by-policy contests constrained Khrushchev. They differentiated between power and authority, concentrating less on the leader's grip on a formal post and more on the latter, the ability to get things done.[4] Soviet dissidents Roy and Zhores Medvedev argued that Khrushchev determined the goals and content of policy initiatives, especially in agriculture. Approving of early programs such as the Virgin Lands, they deemed his later policies unsatisfactory, emphasizing how they contributed to his downfall.[5] Post-Soviet histories have sustained this line of argument, finding that Khrushchev's power and authority combined to prevent any opposition from coming together for most of the period.[6] Having survived the challenge by those he dubbed "the antiparty group" in 1957, he packed the Central Committee and Presidium with supporters who backed him until evidence of mounting foreign and domestic setbacks damaged his prestige and advancing age slowed him. By the 1960s, in that view, Khrushchev's authority began to wane and his vulnerability rose gradually for several years prior to his ouster in October 1963. Party figures' antipathy toward him, not to mention the negative public opinion they heeded only a little, increased as his downfall neared.[7]

Examining how decrees mandating corn cultivation emerged, I argue that the

---

[4] Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, 3.

[5] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, xiv.

[6] Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 4. Characterizing the period as a weakening in the "totalitarian regime," he nonetheless suggests that Khrushchev relied on dictatorial powers and the "authoritarian control of the party and state" to achieve his ends. Ibid., 107.

[7] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 171.

agricultural sphere diverged from that standard narrative. First, Khrushchev had already begun to solidify his authority over agriculture in September 1953, and achieved unchallenged control over the sector by the time he launched the corn crusade in January 1955: that is, well *before* June 1957. Second, his authority over agriculture persisted even as production shortfalls mounted and queues for food formed. Even in 1964, he continued to determine *policy*, even as his ability to ensure its execution declined. In fact, that latter capacity had never been as complete as scholars have imagined: the napping collective farm chairman and similar impediments limited Khrushchev's capacity to carry out policies. He dictated the boundaries of debate, but could not enforce directives designed to bring his plans to fruition.

Echoing Khrushchev's successors, who condemned his policies as "harebrained scheming," scholars have disparaged the potential of corn cultivation, thereby denying that other officials were responsible for the disappointing results.[8] That portrayal fails to capture the whole phenomenon, because the principles behind Khrushchev's wager on it reflected successful global precedents of industrial farming based on corn. Moreover, when the Presidium, still packed with Stalin's men, accepted the policy in 1955, it was not yet under Khrushchev's thumb. In fact, officials throughout the hierarchy only rarely voiced halfhearted protests. They paid lip service to party directives, but their actions sent mixed messages. The legacy of Lenin's "democratic centralism" and years spent under the threat of Stalin's repression, party discipline meant that no one openly dissented. In most cases, local authorities spread corn even in regions where the climate prevented it from succeeding. Yet even in locales with a favorable climate, their actions demonstrated skepticism, an unspoken assumption about the crop's low potential, by eschewing recommended methods for cultivating it and by refusing to commit scarce machines, chemicals, fertilizer, and labor to growing a crop in which they did not believe. These choices ensured that corn did not succeed, fulfilling their expectations that it would fail. These

[8] See, for example: Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 107; and Rusinov, "Agrarnaia politika KPSS," 40–43.

behaviors reflect administrative practices that incentivized *appearing* to meet the requirements of some temporary campaign, but also encouraged officials to devote little effort to ensuring an actual harvest because they expected the leaders' attention to soon move on to the next campaign.

Before 1991, observers trying to make sense of Soviet politics could rely only on leaders' public remarks. In the 1970s, political scientists Jerry Hough described how "inputs" such as desired outcomes, organizations' requests for resources, ideological preferences, and related concerns entered "the black box of policy-making itself." The box's "output" consisted of orders requiring subordinates to implement policies aimed at achieving specific goals. Thus Hough set aside concern over power struggles, concentrating instead on issues of authority and administration.[9] Access to government and Communist Party documents now offer historians an opportunity to reconstruct such processes.[10] Private exchanges, unrecorded telephone calls, interpersonal relationships, and other untraceable influences also shape decision-making. Tapping archival collections and memoir accounts, this chapter pries open a corner of the "black box" by detailing the policies that launched Khrushchev's crusade for corn.

* * *

Khrushchev and his fellow members of the "collective leadership" confronted a grim reality when Stalin died in March 1953. During Stalin's final years, requirements of postwar reconstruction and military spending channeled investment into heavy and defense industries. The war had required government and party organizations to adapt to circumstances, but postwar reconsolidation of the hierarchical system curbed what might have been an opportunity

---

[9] Hough, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, vii.

[10] The Archive of the President of the Russian Federation [*Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, APRF] contains materials of the Central Committee Presidium, but is closed. The declassified records of the Central Committee's administrative and information-gathering apparatus, however, are available in RGANI.

for economic, cultural, and political experimentation.[11] Farms struggled to repair damage suffered during the war and recover from the state's extractions of grain to drive that investment. Millions of peasants who had served in the Red Army rushed from farms to factories, which offered better prospects, soon followed by millions of others.[12] Cultural and intellectual life suffered in campaigns against "cosmopolitanism," a charge accusing those with foreign connections of sinister anti-Soviet loyalties that frequently served to defame and even eliminate prominent Jewish figures. As the Stalinist system reentrenched itself, popular "hopes" that wartime sacrifices had earned a chance at a better life transformed into "illusions" and then "disappointments."[13] The mood darkening Soviet society paralleled the atmosphere in Stalin's inner circle. Khrushchev recalled in his memoirs that, when he returned to Moscow from Kyiv in 1949, he found that the aging dictator humiliated those even in the highest political positions by "behaving toward people as though he were God and had created them; his attitude was at once patronizing and contemptuous."[14] The tyrant's suspicious disposition and need to cling to power despite declining health compelled him to manipulate his underlings, while isolation at the summit of his "cult of personality" led him to require their attendance at tense, alcohol-fueled

---

[11] Amir Weiner, "Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution: The Life Cycle of the Soviet Revolution, 1945–1968," *Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 2 (2008): 222. See also: Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 15. Zubkova and Verbitskaia also cross the boundary between the postwar and post-Stalin eras.

[12] Mark Edele outlines opposing interpretations of this trend. Before the opening of the archives, social historians argued that millions of veterans had not returned to or left the countryside as quickly as possible. The standard Soviet position instead saw millions returning to solidify the collective farms, a position supported by investigations in regional archives. Edele, "Veterans and the Village: The Impact of Red Army Demobilization on Soviet Urbanization, 1945–1955," *Russian History* 36 (2009): 160–61. Drawing on more comprehensive materials in central archives, Edele concludes that the initial migration was relatively slow, growing to a flood only later. Ibid., 175–76. Overall, about two-thirds of all soldiers demobilized in 1945 and 1946 received discharge to rural areas. Ibid., 164. Russian social historian O. M. Verbitskaia finds a similar pattern, figuring the increase in rural population at 1.9 million by 1947, a relatively small number in comparison with the Red Army's wartime size. This small increase reversed in subsequent years, as famine, taxes, and harsh working conditions on the collectives drove millions more to seek employment in industry. Between 1948 and 1950, 3.1 million departed villages in the RSFSR alone, and a further 4.5 million in the other union republics combined, a total of 7.6 million. Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 81–83.

[13] Zubkova, *Russia after the War*.

[14] *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2:83.

soirées lasting into the early morning. For the political elite, no less than society as a whole, this period was "the bleakest of all."[15]

Stalin's death appears as a turning point in this characterization, but recently scholars have reappraised the postwar years, discerning heretofore obscured trends and emphasizing continuities between Stalin's final years and the subsequent era. Historian Amir Weiner highlights how the state controlled the economy and its foundational units, defining principles of the system that remained in place under Khrushchev.[16] The collective farms, state farms, compulsory procurements, and onerous taxes on peasants' personal plots remained, although evident abuses spurred the new leadership to enact tax and procurement reforms in August 1953, aiding rural families and stimulating production. Even the reforms characteristic of the early post-Stalin years originated before March 1953, when circumstances inside the Kremlin foreshadowed change. Stalin's power precluded any open challenge, but his age and failing health allowed members of his court a degree of independent authority in their assigned areas of responsibility. In the "Leningrad Affair" of 1949, the second city's leaders paid with their lives for losing a factional struggle and for Stalin's chronic suspicion of the city. Chastened, his underlings subsequently used their growing authority to ensure some stability. Illness and fatigue took their toll in the early 1950s, encouraging Stalin to vacation on the Black Sea coast, from which he exercised only loose control over party and state. In his absence, deputies developed a style of decision-making that political historians Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk characterize as a precursor to the "collective leadership" associated with the period between March 1953 and June 1957.[17] As these absences lengthened, the men who controlled the branches of the party, government, and economy gained influence over their respective spheres.

---

[15] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 211.

[16] Weiner, "Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution, 209.

[17] Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10.

The party reemerged as a force beginning in 1952, a development that spanned the transition from Stalin's final year to the early struggles among his successors for power. Scholars long characterized his death as a turning point, after which Khrushchev asserted the party's role to further his cause in the struggle for power against G. M. Malenkov and his government constituency.[18] This party renewal in fact began at Stalin's behest, giving Khrushchev a point of departure from which to continue the process. In late 1952, Stalin reinvigorated procedures he previously had neglected, calling the Nineteenth Party Congress—the first since 1939. The gap of thirteen years contrasted with the first twenty-two years after the Revolution, when leaders had summoned eleven congresses, and the subsequent period when they convoked them every four or five years. The congress demonstrated a current of "party revivalism," on which Khrushchev drew in 1953 as he augmented the authority of the party.[19] He and the other members of the collective leadership strengthened it further by reestablishing regular meetings of other bodies Stalin had allowed to atrophy. They began to regularly convene the Central Committee Presidium, as Stalin had renamed the Politburo as he expanded its size at the congress, but which he also had replaced in practice with an informal handpicked coterie. Khrushchev insisted on regular Central Committee plenums, which brought the full body to Moscow to discuss major policy changes and provided Khrushchev a forum for propagating new initiatives. Misjudging the party's resurgence and considering the government stronger based on its wartime and postwar preeminence, Malenkov became head of government in March 1953, voluntarily ceding his position as the most prominent Central Committee secretary to Khrushchev.

Khrushchev's rivalry with Malenkov ran at least as deep as conflicts between the two

---

[18] This was a hallmark of the "conflict school." See, for example: Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership*, 29. It had remained a commonly held view. See: McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 41. Historians I. V. Aksiutin and A. V. Pyzhikov have argued for a moderate version of this conclusion by contending the conflict was not for power alone, but also to determine between competing visions of the relative importance of party and government. I. V. Aksiutin and A. V. Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo: Problema liderstva i transformatsiia vlasti* (Moscow: Nauchnaia Kniga, 1999).

[19] Yoram Gorlizki, "Party Revivalism and the Death of Stalin," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 1 (1995): 1–22.

following the former's return to Moscow in March 1949. Instead of Khrushchev, Stalin had granted Malenkov, despite his urban origins and background in industrial management, the mandate to supervise agriculture in his capacity as a Central Committee secretary. As party boss of Moscow oblast, Khrushchev confronted its collective farms' exhausted soil and lack of machinery. He began to amalgamate them into larger units to pool capital and streamline administration, a strategy he had pursued in Ukraine. In March 1951, an article had appeared in *Pravda* under Khrushchev's name in which he advocated demolishing the ramshackle villages and constructing what he called *agrogorody*, or "agrotowns." Traditional detached wooden houses would give way to multifamily apartment buildings outfitted with modern conveniences. The new communities promised the smart physical appearance and cultural resources of urban life. Khrushchev had failed to account for the enormous cost and ideological implications of granting precedence to consumption over production, bringing swift attacks from Malenkov and others that, because they were blessed by Stalin, threatened Khrushchev's political fortunes. He found himself compelled to beg Stalin for forgiveness, fearing the consequences of the boss's disapproval. After surviving that political danger, he maintained an outwardly friendly relationship with Malenkov. Their families socialized and their apartments occupied the same building on central Moscow's Granovskii Street, but Khrushchev's resentments toward the polished but jejune bureaucrat simmered.[20]

In 1953, Malenkov and Khrushchev agreed that agriculture was a pressing issue, but it had to await the outcome of the power struggle's first round, in which the two joined with colleagues to topple L. P. Beria in June. In August, Malenkov took the podium at a session of the Supreme Soviet, the USSR's rubber-stamp parliament. He announced reforms easing the extortionate taxes peasants paid on the output of their half-hectare personal plots, eliminating some restrictions on those allotments, and reducing compulsory deliveries of goods for which collective farms received payment less than production costs. Popular responses quickly

[20] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 229.

associated these policies with Malenkov. Bowing to the requirements of party discipline, Khrushchev expressed support for the initiatives to a group of oblast leaders on August 10, 1953.[21]

Khrushchev then responded quickly and decisively, motivated by temperament and the bitter aftertaste of the agrotown debacle. In the words of supporter A. I. Mikoian, Khrushchev "did not forget or forgive" Malenkov for the previous conflict or for the popularity the latter achieved by publicizing the measures.[22] The party boss considered it his prerogative to announce the new policies and, in response, set out to make the Central Committee plenum scheduled for September a stage from which he could offer his own evaluation of the predicament facing Soviet farms.

Khrushchev's approach to composing his speech to this plenum illustrates the style he later applied to his frequent statements on agriculture. Gathering advisors before the session, he explained the pressing issues and the solutions he considered appropriate. The aides transformed his mercurial pronouncements into reports and plans of action. In August and September 1953, they commandeered an office on the top floor of the Central Committee's headquarters, a handsome prerevolutionary building whose neoclassical façade overlooked central Moscow's Old Square, and developed Khrushchev's outline into a speech. Their number included A. S. Shevchenko and G. T. Shuiskii, his personal aides, as well as *Pravda* editors D. T. Shepilov and V. T. Poliakov, and academician I. D. Laptev, president of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences.[23] In future instances, the composition changed, but usually included Shevchenko, V. V. Matskevich, and the heads of Central Committee departments. Holding no post other than that of Khrushchev's adjutant on agriculture, Shevchenko controlled

---

[21] Tomilina, et al., eds., *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev*, 2:22–51.

[22] A. I. Mikoian, *Tak bylo: Razmyshleniia o minuvshem* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1999), 261.

[23] Strelianyi, "Last Romantic," 569.

access to the First Secretary and possessed powers that aroused resentment.[24] In his memoirs, Shepilov describes the atmosphere of the period, when shared meals and car rides replaced the stringent hierarchy and suspicion of the Stalin years.[25] Shepilov recalls that two teams labored: the one of which he was a member formulated a set of formal directives for the plenum's approval. A parallel one prepared Khrushchev's speech to the assembled party notables.[26] Historian A. A. Nikonov also describes how Khrushchev dictated major themes to subordinates.[27] Moreover, the files of the Central Committee's apparatus attest to similar practices as late as July 1964.[28]

Shepilov later scoffed that Khrushchev's speech had lacked direction and depth, the very characteristics for which Nikonov praised it. Not surprising given the circumstances of his subsequent fall from grace, Shepilov condemned Khrushchev. He expressed dismay that Khrushchev rejected his team's resolution, forcing the plenum to instead adopt a version adapted from his own speech.[29] "That report contained everything he saw in the countryside, everything he knew about agriculture," Shepilov wrote. He contrasted his own formal training with Khrushchev's experiential knowhow, concluding that the address "neither presented a fundamental analysis of the real state of our agriculture nor defined the basic issues that had to

---

[24] For more on the First Secretary's personal aides, see: Hough, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, 419. On Shevchenko's power and resulting anger, see: Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 137.

[25] D. T. Shepilov, *The Kremlin's Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Khrushchev*, ed. Stephen V. Bittner, trans. Anthony Austin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 281.

[26] Ibid., 285.

[27] Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 299.

[28] See the memorandum Khrushchev dictated, "For a future report on agriculture," dated July 6, 1964. Artizov, ed. *Nikita Khrushchev*, 50–51.

[29] Khrushchev and his supporters dismissed Shepilov from the Presidium as a result of the political crisis of June 1957. Although he previously cooperated with Khrushchev, the *Pravda* editor supported Malenkov, Molotov, and the "antiparty group." Khrushchev's partisans subjected him to special slight, suggesting that he had not been a fully-fledged actor, but instead had merely been "Shepilov who joined them" (*primknuvshii k nim Shepilov*). The desire to assert his own importance and independence sets the tone of his posthumously published memoir. Even their Russian title, *Neprimknuvshii*, asserts his denial of the epithet.

be resolved to ensure further development."[30] Instead, the speech consisted of a mishmash of thoughts and schemes, with the important measures—such as those to increase grain production—hidden like wheat among the chaff. Shepilov charged that Khrushchev instead emphasized directionless tinkering on matters such as corn, missing the point by shunting aside the chemicals, fertilizers, and other applications of science and technology.[31] By contrast, Nikonov praised Khrushchev's speech because it for the first time acknowledged the desperate conditions facing rural residents.[32]

That speech was necessary because Soviet leaders lacked knowledge about agriculture and rural life, hampering any attempt to remedy the situation. Bureaucrats had obfuscated things when reporting to Stalin, who consequently had known little about peasants' lives and about agricultural production. Khrushchev later derided him for believing in the accuracy of extravagant socialist-realist films that portrayed singing peasants feasting at tables heavy with food and drink.[33] He also criticized Stalin for never verifying the deceptive statistics he received from officials, who provided them perhaps to protect themselves.[34] Khrushchev and his men met this problem in the summer of 1953, when their lack of data about peasants' income, labor productivity, and consumption inhibited diagnosing rural social and economic ailments. Preparing Khrushchev's speech, Shevchenko confronted V. N. Starovskii, head of the USSR Central Statistical Administration, after the latter repeatedly altered important data reported previously. When Shevchenko rebuked Starovskii for revising a statistic for the fourth time, the

---

[30] Shepilov, *Kremlin's Scholar*, 286.

[31] Ibid., 282.

[32] Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 299.

[33] Khrushchev thus condemned Stalin's approach to agriculture in the Secret Speech denouncing the former leader to the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956. For more, see: Richard Taylor, "Singing on the Steppes for Stalin: Ivan Pyr'ev and the Kolkhoz Musical in Soviet Cinema," *Slavic Review* 58, no. 1 (1999): 143–59. As Taylor explains, the passage has been regarded as a reference to Pyr'ev's award-winning *Kuban Cossacks* (1949), but Pyr'ev's film was hardly the only example. Moreover, as director of the Mosfilm studio in the 1950s, he helped revive Soviet cinema from its Stalinist paralysis.

[34] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:237 and 2:462.

statistician protested that each new version had been an improvement: that is, it had made the situation appear less dire. Shevchenko countered that he cared little for appearances, wanting only a clearer understanding. His riposte had little effect, however, because Starovskii returned the following day with a purportedly better figure.[35]

Khrushchev prided himself on firsthand knowledge, which he demonstrated during his Stalin-era tour of duty in Ukraine. He delighted in inspecting farms in person and forcing other officials, willingly or not, to do the same. In August and September 1953, Khrushchev dragged those attending major gatherings in Moscow to the nearby model farms he knew well. There they observed demonstrations of his favorite methods and crops, including square-cluster planting and corn.[36] He viewed Moscow oblast as a proving ground for corn cultivation and an example for similar areas lacking the rich black-earth soils and warmer temperatures found to the south and west, where corn was common. In Moscow, where it had been at most a novelty, the special farms achieved harvests that appeared to vindicate Khrushchev's faith in it. Dragooning the others into these daytrips, he expected them to understand the planting and other techniques at a level equaling his own, an expenditure of time and effort few proved willing to match.

Khrushchev's message to the plenum itself criticized existing policy and revealed the difficulties farms faced, thereby affirming that he was in charge of agriculture. Yet his program lacked the singular focus on a particular solution characteristic of later statements launching the Virgin Lands campaign in February 1954 and the corn crusade in January 1955. He dismissed Malenkov's assertion, made at the Nineteenth Party Congress, that the USSR's grain supply was and would remain adequate. Khrushchev criticized his rival, whom he did not name, for using

---

[35] Strelianyi, "Last Romantic," 569–70.

[36] Khrushchev referred to visits to the Gorki-2 state farm in his August 1953 remarks. Tomilina, et al., eds. *Dva tsveta vremeni*, 2:31. Nikonov describes from personal experience outings to that farm and others in the oblast to inspect corn, square-cluster planting methods, and other techniques in the days surrounding the September 1953 plenum. Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 299.

misleading measurements of maximum potential yield with no accounting for spoilage or loss, rather than the actual harvest, a standard practice under Stalin. Khrushchev charged that grain output could not meet rising demand for food, let alone supply the feed necessary to meet production targets for meat, milk, and eggs. He highlighted many potential solutions, including mechanization, improved cultivation methods, and eliminating waste during harvest and storage.[37] He extolled corn as a possible remedy because it provided grain and feed alike. In 1954, corn cultivation consequently expanded from 3.5 million to 4.3 million hectares and in every union republic, as dozens of regions planted corn for the first time.[38]

In 1954, Khrushchev and the party concentrated on the Virgin Lands adventure. Tens of thousands of volunteers, including many members of the Communist Youth League, or Komsomol, traveled to sparsely settled lands in Kazakhstan and Western Siberia to establish vast, industrial-scale farms for producing wheat for state procurement. Their initial results proved positive, bolstering Khrushchev's prestige and authority over agriculture, but also making him overconfident in the size and reliability of these grain harvests. Extending the program to other regions, he pushed to expand the frontier of newly plowed lands, which required devoting capital that might have earned greater returns if invested in settled regions. Taubman concludes that the scheme proved a political boon in 1954 and 1955: by undertaking a program in the tradition of Stalinist mass-mobilization schemes, Khrushchev demonstrated the aggressive, visionary leadership offered by no other leader, least of all Malenkov.[39]

Having prioritized the Virgin Lands, Khrushchev delayed his crusade for corn until the January 1955 Central Committee plenum, the fourth such meeting on agriculture in just eighteen months. His address developed from the familiar procedure, in which he convened his agricultural aides, diagnosed problems, and sketched out measures to remedy them. These

---

[37] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:28.

[38] Jasny, *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*, 142.

[39] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 263.

statements established the boundaries of debate over policy. Room remained only to determine how far and how fast to journey down the path Khrushchev had already chosen. Recorded in a document dated November 5, 1954, his contributions to the speechwriting process took the form of a monologue touching on some, but not all of the topics in the final speech, suggesting that he had additional input at some other point in the process. The text's unpolished quality and informal language indicate that it was a set of instructions, rather than a formal memorandum. Reproduced for a small number of advisors, this and similar documents guided those who enjoyed Khrushchev's confidence as they developed the proposals he expected to come to his desk. It contains no introductory phrases; instead, it launches into a critique of livestock-raising practices and, in particular, feed production.[40] Khrushchev conveyed his unabashed enthusiasm for corn, "We will raise corn because it has proven itself. It possesses boundless potential as feed." "There is a limit," he cautioned, "but that limit is distant." Acknowledging that solving the meat and milk problem required more than just corn, he allowed that even this miraculous crop could not succeed if unaccompanied by subsidiary measures. Technology proved essential harvesting corn before the frost, so he emphasized the priority of manufacturing necessary machines. Similarly, the harvest might go to waste in the absence of silos and other structures in which farms could store silage to nourish cattle during the long winters typical of most of the USSR's agricultural regions.[41]

The January 1955 plenum also removed Malenkov from his post as head of government, which aided Khrushchev's efforts to consolidate his authority. Demonstrating his new clout, Khrushchev filled the plenum proceedings with discussion of his agricultural policies, yet scholars have assigned more significance to the political maneuverings than to the agricultural programs. Citing Malenkov's failures of leadership and misstatements on ideological points, the First Secretary and other Presidium members forced Malenkov to become deputy premier. They

[40] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 64, l. 241.

[41] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 64, l. 242.

condemned him for advocating spending on consumer and food-processing industries, for a nonconformist position on the danger of nuclear war, and for ties to the disgraced Beria.[42] By contrast, Khrushchev occupied the ideological high ground by following traditions that assigned primacy to heavy industry in investment plans, relegating agriculture and consumer goods to second place. The party boss was hardly an embattled consumer advocate, least of all at this point early in the decade, despite the concern for consumers and rural citizens evident in his earlier agrotown scheme.[43] Criticizing Malenkov's unorthodox positions did not require Khrushchev to opportunistically bend his policy preferences, only to pursue the line he already considered necessary. In agriculture, he called not for radical increases in investment, but more efficiently using the surplus capacity he saw in Soviet farms, which needed better leadership and smarter management of their productive capacities. These convictions motivated his frequent condemnations of party leaders and the bureaucracy.[44] He imagined that resulting gains might produce a self-sustaining reinvestment by farms, allowing growth without resorting to a full-scale diversion of resources from industrial and military budgets. At the same time, competition with Malenkov restrained Khrushchev's enthusiasm, which reined in his policies until launching the optimistic initiatives following the June 1957 crisis that removed restraints on his authority.[45]

Corn was foremost among the measures Khrushchev deemed critical to bringing this unutilized capacity into action. On January 25, 1955, he proclaimed the crop's new status to the plenum, calling it "the decisive requirement" for increasing output of milk, eggs, and meat. Embracing a three-part approach to raising output, he argued for continuing to plow up virgin and fallow land, increasing the productivity of farms in settled regions, and raising the

---

[42] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 265.

[43] Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, 24–28.

[44] Ibid., 32.

[45] Zubkova, "Rivalry with Malenkov," 84.

proportion of cropland devoted to corn threefold.[46] Corn offered a remedy to shortages of grain and feed alike. To substantiate this argument, Khrushchev resorted to a favorite tactic, reminding his audience of the comparison he had made in September 1953 between the extent of corn plantings and harvests in the US and in the USSR.[47]

Khrushchev conceded that corn faced real climatic limits, but his enthusiasm for technological solutions pushed him to disregard tradition. He acknowledged boundaries on the area where corn might fully mature, producing grain, but only until Soviet specialists could develop techniques for overcoming cool and dry growing conditions.[48] This presumption informed the mission of the delegation to the US later that year. Its experts examined corn in Iowa, but also focused on northerly regions of Minnesota and southern Canada where conditions more closely resembled those prevailing in European Russia.[49] The plenum approved an initiative requiring each region and republic to attempt to grow corn, even where farmers and planners alike had previously considered it unsuitable; if a region already grew corn, its directives demanded more. Khrushchev declared that if farms grew corn not for grain, but for livestock feed, then the crop needed only to reach the "milky-wax" stage of maturity before harvest and could therefore grow much farther north than before. Khrushchev set about convincing his audience, bound by the traditional extent of corn cultivation, that this innovation in using corn would pay off. He dismissed the old northern boundary that ran from Chernivtsi in Western Ukraine through Vinnytsia, to the south of Kyiv through Luhans'k and eastward into Russia's North Caucasus region. He agitated instead for planting it that spring hundreds of kilometers to the north.[50] He demanded a rise in plantings from a postwar low of 3.5 million

---

[46] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:429.

[47] Ibid., 1:432.

[48] Ibid., 1:432.

[49] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 22, d. 89, ll. 135–36.

[50] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:433. He repeated this assertion endlessly, demonstrating that he considered corn livestock feed from the beginning. Even the grain farms in

hectares in 1953, or just 3.3 percent of cultivated land, to 28 million hectares in 1960, approaching 30 percent, its relative proportion of cropland in the US. To buttress this point, he used another favored tactic, a small example of a special farm that proved in his mind a general claim about a broad region. The Lenin collective farm of the Vurnar district in the Chuvash ASSR of European Russia's upper Volga region provided the case. Reading from a letter written to the Central Committee by the farm's chairman, Khrushchev described how in 1954 the collective farmers had grown thirty-five hectares of corn, a crop previously alien to the area, and harvested a high yield of silage and grain. "In recent years . . . we have tested planting corn in various regions of the USSR," he enthused. "Everywhere, even in northern regions, where it has received proper care, good yields have resulted."[51] He qualified his ardor by emphasizing careful cultivation and use of machines; however, these conditions often went unmet, contributing to corn's poor showing in the initial years of the crusade.

A second, less publicized statement Khrushchev made at this plenum demonstrates the contrast between the addresses composed by others with his input, and his informal remarks. Contrasting with that more formal style, the closing statement he made on January 29, 1955, and the questions he posed to other speakers in intervening sessions illustrate the latter. "The Americans are not dumber than us," he explained, noting that the preponderance of corn in the United States approximated the level he proposed for 1960, amounting to some 30 percent of arable land devoted to corn. Disregarding his earlier caution, he declared that corn could grow anywhere. "Now we can not only compete but, strictly speaking, we can overtake America

---

southern regions produced served as food not for people, but as feed for animals. Zelenin suggests that Khrushchev initially expected plantings of corn to yield mature grain even in the new regions, only later retreating to advocate for feed. Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 108. Khrushchev always expected those regions to harvest corn at stages less than fully mature. On the advice of experts, he considered it equal in nutritive value to mature grain. Many variables—moisture content, rate of spoilage, grain maturity, production cost, etc.—make a comparison difficult, but this equivalency at least in some cases proves true. Khrushchev spoke enthusiastically about the possibility of harvesting mature grain especially after 1960, he never abandoned the primary commitment to using corn as feed, no matter what stage of maturity it reached.

[51] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:433.

because the potential for corn cultivation now truly expands to cover the whole territory of the Soviet Union," he blustered, assuring the audience that the resulting feed could raise the productivity of the lagging but vital livestock sector.[52] Later that spring, he went further still, claiming that corn might grow even in Yakutiia, a vast region of subarctic taiga in the USSR's northeastern reaches.[53] This and similar wild assertions, although they never led to anything more than timid experiments in those regions, gave rise to common claims that Khrushchev demanded corn cultivation beyond the Arctic Circle.[54]

In January 1955, Khrushchev also addressed the pitfalls of party and government practices for managing the economy, warning that party bosses could not merely give farms orders and expect satisfactory results. Instead, they "had to drive into the consciousness of all farmworkers corn plantings' importance," a demanding task that officials had already misunderstood. He employed another of his favored tactics by taking to task one of the many regional leaders who had spoken in response to his opening report. Praising Z. I. Muratov, party leader of the Tatar ASSR, and expressing a desire to avoid giving offense, Khrushchev lambasted Muratov's attempts at agricultural planning. He had earlier sniped at Muratov because he believed that the 40,000 hectares of corn the republic's leaders proposed would not solve its feed shortage. Conferring among themselves, Muratov and his advisors had returned with a higher, but arbitrary figure. They decided that 200,000 hectares might satisfy Khrushchev's demands, but they had not actually calculated the republic's targets for livestock, the concomitant feed requirements, corn's potential yields, or the hectarage required to produce the needed feed. Khrushchev fumed that this old method, simply naming higher figures to placate superiors' demands, did not satisfy his expectations for rational planning and management. Forcing this measure on the farms would unquestionably lead to "foolishness" and outlandish

---

[52] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 126, l. 108.

[53] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:38.

[54] For one of the many, see: Rusinov, "Agrarnaia politika KPSS," 41.

excuses for the inevitable failure to produce its planned meat and dairy output.[55] Khrushchev and others repeatedly ridiculed one such tale at the plenum. Leaders of districts and of Moscow oblast had claimed that their small efforts to grow corn in 1954 had not succeeded because of circumstances beyond their control. Flocks of rooks, they professed, had ravaged the fields by digging the corn seeds from the ground before they could germinate after planting.[56]

Voicing characteristic antagonism toward the bureaucracy, Khrushchev thundered that in regard to corn they "must not be armchair administrators, but describe it to collective farmers so that they understand."[57] Often, district leaders were inept because few party members volunteered to serve, due to abysmal pay, low status, and grim living conditions. Those who did frequently wasted time holding "conversations empty of content" and filled "with generalized slogans." Party chiefs possessed neither practical knowledge about production, nor the authority to ensure that policies were executed properly, circumstances compounded when they misunderstood directives from above.[58] Khrushchev proved farsighted about the bureaucracy's limitations, which stood out clearly to him before the corn program began thanks to his many years of experience in the system.

The Soviet press widely publicized and endlessly repeated Khrushchev's message on corn, providing the average local official a guide to the party line. Texts of important speeches and summaries of others, as well as unsigned editorials in *Pravda* and *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* guided those responsible for agriculture. Following the January plenum, the headline of the first of these pieces, known in Russian as a "leader," set the tone with its martial language by declaring, "The directives of the Central Committee plenum are a plan of battlefield action."[59] In

---

[55] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 126, ll. 110–12.

[56] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 126, l. 114 and l. 120.

[57] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 126, l. 115.

[58] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 126, l. 119.

[59] "Resheniia Plenuma TsK KPSS – boevaia programma deistvii," *Pravda* (February 4, 1955): 1.

subsequent days, newspapers put the directives promoting corn at the center of attention under headlines declaring "a battle to fulfill them."[60] Interminable texts running four, six, or in this case, ten pages of dense columns, Khrushchev's remarks saw thorough editing to eliminate sensitive content and to soften the First Secretary's unscripted remarks.[61] In addition, the party hierarchy distributed edited transcripts of plenums to subordinate organizations, which held their own meetings to convey their content.[62] These statements of policy guided the words and, at least in theory, the actions of union, republican, oblast, and local party organizations.

Despite procedures for disseminating orders and Khrushchev's denunciations of bureaucratic routine in propagandizing corn and carrying out his plans to grow it, troubles caused further handwringing on his part. On March 4, 1955, he met with agricultural advisors I. A. Benediktov, P. P. Lobanov, V. P. Mylarshchikov, and F. S. Krest'ianinov. A stenographer's record of the meeting sheds further light on Khrushchev's goals and concerns, revealing private trepidation about hurdles in the path to growing large harvests of corn in 1955.

Khrushchev again bemoaned administrative practices inherited from Stalin. Despite the passage of only a few weeks since the launch of his corn campaign, Khrushchev had already accumulated grievances against the bureaucracy. He grumbled that many officials merely

---

[60] "Sovetskii narod goriacho odobriaet resheniia Plenuma TsK KPSS i razvertyvaet bor'bu za ikh osushchestvlenie," *Pravda* (February 5, 1955): 1.

[61] This speech appeared in *Pravda* only on February 3, 1955. "Ob uvelichenii proizvodstva produktov zhivotnovodstva: Doklad tovarishcha N. S. Khrushcheva na Plenume Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS, 25 ianvaria 1955 god," *Pravda* (February 3, 1955): 1–10. Shepilov reproduces an anecdote on the subject of these speeches' length: "Question to Armenian Radio: Can an elephant be wrapped in a newspaper? Answer: Yes, [but only] if the newspaper contains one of Khrushchev's speeches." Shepilov, *Kremlin's Scholar*, 286. Shepilov describes in detail the editing processes, which sought to limit the damage resulting from Khrushchev's potentially embarrassing slips of the tongue. Ibid., 284. Roy and Zhores Medvedev also suggest that A. S. Shevchenko possessed wide authority over this procedure when the speech involved agriculture. Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 136–37.

[62] Standard procedure required the subordinate committees to return these to the Central Committee within a set timeframe. The files of the Stavropol krai party committee, for example, contain several demands from the Protocol Branch in Moscow for the return of these individually numbered documents. See, for example: GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6413, l. 72. Dated May 10, 1955, the memorandum demands the return of stenographic reports for each of the four most recent plenums sent for use by I. P. Boitsov, the krai's first secretary.

blathered about corn only as a grain, rather than as a source of grain *and* feed. Consequently, the spotlight the plenum had shined on the crop had already resulted in unsatisfactory radio, print, and film propaganda. Its frequency and volume had risen, but its substance had changed little. Khrushchev denounced even the Moscow newspapers responsible for setting the tone, *Pravda* and *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo*, for failing to effectively illuminate the matter. Officials and the press prattled endlessly about the crop's importance and methods for planting it, but advocated techniques at odds with the party's recommendations. Although they achieved little, officials chattered on: "Why?" he asked rhetorically, "Because they have been taught that way for decades; but now we've moved on."[63] His meaning remains opaque: Khrushchev might have implied that officials had learned from years of experience to view corn in this muddled way. The crop's unfamiliarity in all but some southwestern regions, however, indicates that this criticism addressed the party and government machinery in general. Decades of experience in the Stalinist system had conditioned party leaders and agricultural managers to respond to any initiative in this way. They concentrated on the topic handed down from above with little consultation, confident that attention would soon move on to the next policy, allowing them to resume business as usual. Khrushchev feared—rightly, as it turned out—just this result in the case of corn. He demanded that his subordinates ensure that each leader at every level understood the importance of corn and that it would remain a permanent point of emphasis. Khrushchev advised the aides to use the press to find fault with some of these officials.[64] Although he did not name the offending article, Khrushchev complained that Shepilov, the editor of *Pravda*, "had printed a leading article [reproducing] text directly from the plenum [resolutions] in a bold type without commentary," a description fitting the editorial in the edition of March 1, 1955.[65] This was a flawed approach, Khrushchev stated. "We must make this

---

[63] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 64, l. 31.

[64] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 64, l. 32.

[65] "Uvelichenie posevov kukuruzy – krupneishii rezerv uvelicheniia proizvodstva zerna," *Pravda* (March 1,

matter plain. What is written in the plenum directives is a point of departure, but we must clarify it so that everyone comprehends what it will look like in action."[66] A survey of articles in *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* from January until the start of the planting season in May suggests that Khrushchev's order had some effect. During February and March, they exhorted readers to participate by, as a recurring rubric put it, building "expansive socialist competition for high yields of corn."[67] In the two weeks following Khrushchev's comments, content began to concentrate on specific tasks necessary to plant corn using the approved methods.[68]

Lecturing his agricultural aides-de-camp, Khrushchev reiterated that corn furthered the mission to improve living standards and served as a means to meet rising consumer demand. Corn, fertilizers, and other measures provided the means for rapidly meeting those requirements. He told his advisors, "I believe only in [corn], otherwise no five or six years will save us. . . . We will use new means [corn] to do the job."[69] He did not specify from what or whom the Soviet leaders needed to save themselves; however, Khrushchev genuinely believed that improving citizens' living standards, as measured by necessities like clothing, housing, and food, provided the only sure way to prevent social unrest. Failure might lead to the unpredictable mass disturbances Soviet leaders feared. In his memoirs, Khrushchev described how he and his compatriots felt unease, which made them cautious toward the Thaw. Carrying the thaw metaphor further, he wrote how they feared it might grow into a flood, that developments might "overwhelm us and we would find it difficult to cope. . . . We didn't want

---

1955): 1.

[66] RGASIP, f. 556, op. 22, d. 64, l. 31.

[67] The rubric, "Shire sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie za vysokii urozhai kukuruzy," first appeared on February 22, 1955, followed by reprises on February 26 and 27 and on March 2, 3, 4, 8, and 10. At that point, its frequency declined to approximately once a week.

[68] Substantive articles on technical matters appeared on March 9, 1955, as well as March 13 and 17. Pieces of this type were published sporadically until planting. See, for example, a report from Tambov oblast: "Massovoe obuchenie agrotekhniki i mekhanizatsii vozdelivanii kukuruzy," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (April 1, 1955): 1.

[69] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 64, l. 32.

some tidal wave to come along that would sweep us away."[70] That threat might have resulted just as easily from discord sparked by empty store shelves as by revelations about Stalin's crimes or the millions formerly interred in labor camps. Indeed, as historians have documented in the case of tragedies such as Novocherkassk, workers' grievances occasionally did build into mass protest.

Khrushchev's goal to raise living standards illustrated his practical, even utilitarian understanding of socialism, which critics at home and abroad have disparaged.[71] Speaking to a conference of farmworkers in Leningrad in April 1955, Khrushchev described popular demands Soviet leaders faced. He contended that living standards were not a problem of ideology that the party could solve simply by pointing out the injustices and irrationalities of capitalism. Instead, leaders had to answer to workers. "'I believe in you,'" Khrushchev's imagined citizen said, "'I fought for this [system] in the Civil War, fought against the Germans, defeated fascism. But if it's all the same, tell me: Will there be meat? Will there be milk? Will there be good pairs of pants?'" The socialist economy had to provide basic comforts or its achievements—hard won in the crash industrialization of the 1930s, defended in war, and reconstructed afterward—would prove in vain. Drawing laughter and applause, Khrushchev responded to those questions, "Of course, this is not [a question of] ideology. It is impossible to have the correct ideology but go about without pants."[72] Although he often emphasized material riches, Khrushchev also articulated an idealistic vision for reforming individuals, society, and politics, culminating in the Third Party Program that announced the "the full-scale construction of communism."

---

[70] *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2:558.

[71] For instance, the Sovietologist Leopold Labedz, writing in the American government-sponsored journal *Problems of Communism*, concluded that Khrushchev "must realize the utter incongruity of reducing the problem of achieving the Realm of Freedom [communism] to a question of per capita production of meat and milk." Labedz, "Ideology: The Fourth Stage," in *Russia under Khrushchev*, ed. Brumberg, 46–48. Similarly, Shepilov ridiculed Khrushchev's assertions about material matters, encapsulated in Khrushchev's purported assertion, "'Communism is pancakes with melted butter *and* sour cream [emphasis added].'" Shepilov, *Kremlin's Scholar*, 292.

[72] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:126–27.

Corn contributed to Khrushchev's vision of achieving those goals. In a similar address in Saratov in mid March, he allowed that the USSR might achieve the abundance he promised without corn, but only by expending more time and resources. "Communism is not something pie-in-the-sky [*chto-to zanebesnoe*]. We are not priests who say that the earthly paradise is only temporary, while heaven is eternal and must be earned by suffering on earth. . . . We can [ensure a high standard of living] faster, easier, and cheaper with corn, if only we can learn how to grow it."[73] Corn possessed almost miraculous abilities in his mind, and Khrushchev rejoiced in finding anyone who shared his enthusiasm for it, even if they showed it in unusual ways. He frequently touted corn's capacity to provide both grain and silage; speaking to his advisors in March, he described a third potential use. Describing his home village, Kalinovka, he explained how the collective farm's corn plantings had produced so much feed that after two years it had abandoned other feed crops. He quipped that corn had yielded so much that the peasants fed it to all their livestock, with so much left over that some had begun "trying to distill moonshine from the mash, although unsuccessfully. As you can see, corn has even solved this third problem. True, these innovators might land in jail, but they are sure they can make moonshine."[74]

This March 4, 1955, conversation offers two instances in which Khrushchev's informal musings produced specific action. Much like his plenum speeches, his public remarks evolved from private discussions with advisors. In this case, he ordered them to produce a text summarizing this commentary on recent events for him to deliver in Saratov on March 18. In the hands of the advisors, his thoughts became the basis for his numerous public remarks during his frequent travels around the country. He broadcast many of the judgments discussed in private to the conference, remarks spread to a much larger audience through a summary that appeared

---

[73] Ibid., 2:27.

[74] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 64, l. 33.

in *Pravda* the following day.[75] Additionally, it forms a link in a chain of events that resulted in policies designed to increase the production of corn harvesters, a subject addressed in chapter 3.

* * *

In 1955, the corn offensive Khrushchev launched achieved mixed results at best. For every farm or district that satisfied feed requirements, many fell short of their goals. The cropland devoted to corn ballooned more than fourfold over the 1954 total, surpassing 17 million hectares. Khrushchev controlled decision-making and policy in agriculture, but his authority over policy did not ensure that the USSR's regions carried it out to his satisfaction. A short time separated the decision in January and planting in May, too little to solve the problem of managers' and farmers' unfamiliarity with the crop and the needed technology. Conceding that farms achieved little in the first year of the crusade, Nikonov concludes, "Every sensible beginning becomes an absurdity when taken to extremes."[76] Regional committees forced farms to plant corn with insufficient regard for preparing and educating workers, as well as cultivating, harvesting, storing, or using the grain and feed. Consequently, a substantial percentage of the fields yielded little to nothing, proving less productive than the oats and barley that corn replaced and tainting Khrushchev's crusade with an inauspicious beginning.

Khrushchev voiced concern about the haste ingrained in the Stalinist economy, as officials acted in contravention of measures enacted in April 1955 to rationalize and decentralize agricultural planning. Republic ministries no longer designated each farms' crop rotations, herd size, and other details of daily operation, as they had under Stalin. Farms received orders only for quantities of given goods the state wished to purchase, leaving the method for producing those products to the farms' discretion: but only so long as they pledged to grow more corn. The campaign mentality Khrushchev encouraged—even as he decried the resulting misdeeds—

---

[75] See also: Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:23–39.

[76] Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 300.

ensured that regional bosses saw corn as the year's priority. Typically, leaders whose domains exceeded plans in whatever the current campaign demanded of them benefitted, while those who acted cautiously, let alone protested, risked censure and demotion. In 1955, oblasts and republics competed to outstrip Khrushchev's expectations, but their leaders failed to secure outcomes that matched Khrushchev's goals. Concerned only with appearances, many officials prioritized reporting that the farms under their control planted more hectares of corn, with less concern for the quantities of grain, silage, meat, and milk produced as a result.

Statistics sent to Moscow support this conclusion. Owing to the atmosphere Khrushchev's insistent campaigning created, however, they are even more suspect than normal. The leaders of oblasts and republics rightly deduced that they had to present an optimistic picture, and as a result farms in each of the climatic zones of the Russian republic [*Rossiiskaia sovetskaia federativnaia sotsialisticheskaia respublika*, RSFSR] planted more hectares of corn.[77] In many of them, the 1955 figure exceeded that of 1954 by a factor of ten. In the Northwest zone, centered on Leningrad and stretching to the north and east to oblasts where cool, damp climates proved unsuitable for corn, the area increased from 18,900 hectares in 1954—already an all-time high—to 272,700 hectares in 1955.[78] This figure likely overstated the true quantity. In documented cases, local authorities reported that a farm had planted corn on a particular field, while actually sowing traditional crops, oats and barley.[79] This likely occurred frequently.

Despite pressure to succeed, authorities reported disastrously small harvests. The RSFSR

---

[77] These large units, used for statistical purposes, encompassed multiple oblasts, territories, and ASSRs. They included entities such as "Western Siberia" and the "Central Non-black-earth Zone," which Soviet authorities used in other settings, such as the conferences of agricultural workers Khrushchev addressed.

[78] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 70, l. 1.

[79] A wide inspection of several oblasts in 1956 found that farms in Ukraine's Odessa oblasts counted the same fields twice. When a harsh winter killed wheat and barley, farms typically replaced it with corn. In addition to reporting this occurrence, these farms reported the same corn in a separate category, as part of their total of spring grains: this made the total amount higher, if only on paper. TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, l. 66.

Ministry of Agriculture admitted to the Central Committee that approximately one hectare in ten in the republic had failed to germinate, yielding nothing; in some locales, the ratio was higher.[80] V. N. Starovskii, head of the Central Statistical Department, reported that across the USSR 6.1 million of the 17.9 million hectares of corn were in "new regions," where corn was unfamiliar. Of the 1.35 million hectares that failed, 958,000 were in those regions.[81] Perhaps made in hopes that these results would convince Moscow of corn's unsuitability to the local climate and land, local authorities' claims may have supported silent protests against the crop. Northern oblasts appealed to Moscow to rescind requirements to plant corn in future years. Straddling the upper Volga River at least four hundred kilometers north of Moscow, Vologda oblast reported that its farms had harvested a mere 5,700 of 33,000 hectares, a failure rate exceeding 80 percent.[82] Murmansk oblast in the far north dutifully tested corn on fifty-three test plots totaling fifty-five hectares, all of which failed, resulting in the cancelation of future corngrowing plans.[83] More commonly, Moscow responded to claims that corn could not grow with criticism and demands for redoubled efforts. The statistics most likely underreported the failure rate, since recordkeeping made self-interested fibbing comparatively easy. In the simplest ruse, farms claimed that a field in which they had planted corn—in poor soil, inattentively cultivated, and therefore stunted, overrun with weeds, and yielding little—had been chopped and fed to livestock as fresh feed or even fed "on the root," which entailed turning livestock loose in the field to eat their fill. In Riazan oblast, for example, a local inspector found that a district party secretary "reported fraudulently" [*otchityvalsia ochkovtiratel'stvom*] to the oblast committee that the district corn had produced a good yield, but that the farms had chopped it and fed it to cattle. Worse still, the party secretary forced the collective farm

[80] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 70, l. 3.

[81] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 84, l. 166.

[82] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 70, l. 3.

[83] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 68, l. 22.

chairmen to report the same.[84] On paper, these seemed to be low-yielding hectares of corn, a result better than admitting to superiors that the crop had failed.

Despite indisputable evidence of lackluster results, analyses that reached the Central Committee characterized the season's campaign a partial success, necessitating further pursuit. Starovskii reported that across the USSR, those corn plantings that did yield a harvest surpassed other crops by providing between two and four times as much livestock feed.[85] Material on the campaign often focused on individual farms, districts, and oblasts that stood out, obscuring the failures. Officials from Khrushchev on down asserted that where corn received proper care, harvests raised output of milk, realizing the policy's promise. Milk output increased in Krasnodar krai by 37 percent. Moreover, the yield remained high through winter months when feed became scarce and dairy production traditionally dipped, a result achieved on the Stalin collective farm in Saratov's Balashov district.[86] This conclusion rested on a tautology: no farm that failed to produce a corn crop could prove that the climate would not allow the crop to grow. Instead, superiors blamed the managers for "the crudest violations of agricultural methods."[87]

These strategies likewise characterized the Soviet press's coverage, a fact arousing Khrushchev's ire. Neither public statements nor secret analyses could overlook the problems stemming from the poor quality of seeds, the absence of specialized machines, and the unfamiliarity of techniques such as square-cluster planting. Khrushchev privately expressed skepticism toward media reports of triumphs. In October, when meeting with the Soviet

---

[84] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 157, l. 17. A similar tactic shifted corn earmarked for one purpose—grain, for instance—to a different statistical category when it failed. On a state farm in Ul'ianovsk oblast, bookkeepers shifted the hectares from the grain category to chopped green feed, transforming failed grain plantings into successful ones for fodder. GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 809a, l. 62.

[85] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 84, ll. 168–69.

[86] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 70, l. 5

[87] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 84, l. 168. Starovskii's statisticians had, furthermore, observed wide divergences in the results of neighboring farms, which they assumed had the same conditions except for the managers. In various regions, the difference in feed output between an advanced farm and its lagging neighbor ranged from 3.6 times to 8 times. RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 84, l. 177.

delegation that had returned from North America, Khrushchev addressed the issue: "Right now we write in the newspapers that corn turned out well everywhere. . . . Yet in places where corn did not, [people] think that Soviet leaders are lying to them and to themselves, and clearly know nothing."[88] He did not specify any particular article or newspaper, but bullish portrayals had appeared often in *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo*, for instance.[89] Wary of popular disaffection, Khrushchev demanded that the ministries "tell the truth about where things are good, about where they are bad, and about why. Then people will understand and adapt their attitudes [to corn]. And if we say that it is great everywhere, that will be bad."[90] In the days following Khrushchev's remark, newspapers ran critical stories.[91] One explained how, in central Russia's Orel oblast, an entire district had reported its corn harvested, but farms in fact had fulfilled only 10 percent of the plan for conserving silage. "The whole crop has been harvested, judging from the reports. . . . In reality, substantial fields have yet to be harvested, and are yellowing and drying" while standing in the field, losing calories and nutrients by the day.[92]

At no point did any official protest the policy of cultivating corn, for protest would have proven futile. Even if individuals viewed the scheme as an obviously wasteful enterprise, the party's culture prohibited speaking out once the decision came down from the Presidium and the Central Committee. This "democratic centralism" apparently did not constrain party

---

[88] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, ll. 159–60.

[89] For example, a full page of stories appeared under the headline: "We carried corn through to the end!" "Doveli kukruzu do dela!" *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (September 18, 1955): 3.

[90] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 162.

[91] In the two weeks prior to Khrushchev's commentary two negative articles and seven positive ones appeared in *Sel'skoe khoziaisitvo*. In the two subsequent weeks, the proportions nearly reversed, becoming two positive pieces and five negative.

[92] F. Shamet'ko, "Ob ochkovtirateliakh i uborke kukuruzy," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (October 13, 1955): 2. Similar articles appeared condemning progress in regions including Stavropol krai, Kustanai oblast in northern Kazakhstan, Kherson oblast in Ukraine, and Frunze oblast in Kyrgyzstan. See: M. Usov, "Na Stavropol'e zatiagivaiut uborku kukuruzy," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (October 6, 1955): 2; Z. Gorbunov, "Uborka kukuruzy pushchena na samotek," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (October 11, 1955): 2; D. Meksin, "Na kukuruznykh poliakh net poriadka," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (October 14, 1955): 2; and I. Dziubenko, "Narushaiut pravila silosovaniia," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (October 19, 1955): 2.

members' actions in practice, but it did govern their words. As far as the evidence allows us to determine, no Presidium member spoke out, even though in January 1955 that body, although positively disposed toward Khrushchev, was not completely under his control. No minutes of the Presidium's meetings are accessible, but the absence of opposition can be posited from the notes V. N. Malin made of its sessions at Khrushchev's orders.[93] Additionally, after surviving the challenge to his power in June 1957, Khrushchev publically attacked former Presidium colleagues, especially V. M. Molotov, for resisting the Virgin Lands campaign in 1954.[94] In his memoir, Shepilov similarly recounted receiving blame from one of Khrushchev's backers for not championing that campaign. Yet Khrushchev never accused the others of having reservations about corn. Shepilov claimed to have spoken out against neither project, even though he considered them wrongheaded. "Like my generation of communists," born around 1905 and educated in politics under Stalin, he wrote, "I had been raised in the spirit of utter loyalty to the party and the strictest discipline; to express doubts at the party's directives would have been sacrilege."[95] His account perhaps seeks to justify his own inaction after the fact, but it also conveys the sense of regimentation shaping loyalists' words.

Regardless, party and government officials did not always carry out Khrushchev's demands with enthusiasm or effectiveness. On occasion, they registered mild discontent. After the January 1955 Central Committee plenum, each republic and region, as procedure required, held a gathering to publicize the new measures. A few local figures spoke up, but dissent proved rare. Word of skepticism, however, did reach Moscow: a certain Comrade Koval, the Central Committee's envoy to the gathering held in Riga, described the response in the Latvian SSR.

---

[93] Head of the Central Committee's vital General Department, Malin recorded systematic but abbreviated summaries of the proceedings during these years. These appear in a published volume: Fursenko, ed., *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, vol. 1.

[94] See, for example: Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 266–67.

[95] Shepilov, *Kremlin's Scholar*, 297.

Speakers frequently mentioned corn in their remarks, but many spoke "timidly" on the subject.[96] Latvian leaders reported to Moscow a less controversial version of events, noting only that "certain communists . . . expressed doubts about the possibility of fulfilling the corn planting [plan]."[97] Koval concluded that the republic's agricultural leaders, including Minister of Agriculture A. A. Nikonov, had pronounced the phrases political expedience required, "which you cannot feed to livestock." They did not, however, follow up with a program of action. At a special gathering of district officials from across the Baltic republic, anonymous voices from the audience questioned: "How will we plant? How will we harvest?" Addressed to republic party secretary I. E. Kalnberzin [in Latvian, Jānis Kalnbērziņš] and reproduced by Koval, an unsigned note complained that the policies Moscow imposed harmed farms' development. Corn planted in 1954 at Moscow's insistence had failed; to repeat that experiment on a larger scale in 1955 demonstrated "foolishness."[98] Because they hid behind anonymity, those registering such complaints confirmed the danger of openly criticizing the party line.

Years later, Nikonov included personal observations in his history of the period, characterizing his own actions by claiming to have spoken "in loud protest against the strong-willed, even adventuristic directive." He and his ministry objected to the order to plant 200,000 hectares of corn in the small republic, judging that farms lacked the machines, seeds, and experience with the crop, which itself was unsuited to the climate. As a consequence of his protests, he "received for starters the labels 'opportunist,' 'oppositionist,' and 'searcher for the easy way out.' Later, 'antiparty element,' among others, was added."[99] These charges contained a serious, no longer mortal danger, as they might have done under Stalin. Nonetheless, the peril of demotion and disgrace stalked officials who showed insufficient enthusiasm in carrying out

---

[96] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 118, l. 17.

[97] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 23, l. 22.

[98] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 118, l. 17.

[99] Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 302.

Moscow's orders. Although proving how vigorously Nikonov protested is impossible, his account conveys a sense of the atmosphere reigning in 1955, one in which lagging zeal for corn could damage otherwise promising careers.

Furthermore, in the spring of 1955, the Soviet government began to reform agricultural planning, a measure Khrushchev championed. The initiative purported to limit the abuses he had denounced in speeches, for example in attacking the Tatar ASSR's Z. I. Muratov at the January plenum. Few regional leaders had objected to corn. Most appeared to follow orders with enthusiasm, and some even overzealously imposed corn. Even after Khrushchev's warning against enforcing arbitrary, one-size-fits-all plans from above, these remained common. As early as the speech in Saratov in March 1955, he cautioned, "I am in no way proposing to impose from above a designated percentage of corn in collective and state farms' plantings." Little benefit would come of doing so for the sake of appearing to follow Moscow's directives, rather than rationally analyzing production.[100] Khrushchev had plenty of reason to fear such practices. Nikonov recalled similar experiences in Latvia in 1955. A state farm director from the Komi ASSR, in the far northeastern reaches of European Russia, recounted another instance. His farm was ordered to plant many hectares of corn. The crop failed, but the farm received a similar set of orders the following year. The corn crop failed again, but the authorities continued to send similar plans for each of the four successive years.[101]

The new procedure for planning replaced Stalin-era practices. Then, republic ministries of agriculture imposed a minutely detailed set of orders on the farms, one growing season at a time. Bureaucrats far from the farm and its local conditions designated the size of each crop and of the herd of different kinds of livestock. In the "new planning procedure," farms mapped out those details for themselves, and several years in advance, based on government orders for particular goods: so much wheat, so much milk, so many eggs. The director of a state farm,

---

[100] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:29.

[101] Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 302.

property of the government, had little choice to follow orders. Collective farms possessed at least nominal independence thanks to the reform. In principle, they had the power to organize planting schedules, crop rotations, herds, and other practical matters within the boundaries established by production plans; these required only formal approval by the district soviet's executive committee. That body approved plans for the farms under its supervision, collated them, and passed them to the oblast soviet, which applied a similar procedure. On paper, this reduced local authorities' influence; it apparently had little effect in practice.

In fact, it created conflicts between farms and the district bosses, typically resolved in favor of the higher authorities with little regard for the collective farms' independence.[102] A case from Siberia's Omsk oblast illustrates this interaction, although intervention by Moscow officials resulted in an atypical outcome. In early 1956, inspectors from the USSR Ministry of Government Oversight arrived to determine the results of corn cultivation in 1955, and to verify preparations for the coming year. They eventually adjudicated a conflict over crop structures between the Khrushchev collective farm and Isil'kul district party committee and soviet. On April 2, the ministry's inspector attended a meeting of the farm's administrative committee, where the chairman and other personnel described repeatedly submitting plans to the district bosses, who altered it to include less corn on three occasions. The farm's management resolved to continue to argue their case before the local authorities while implementing their own plan, which staked much on planting, cultivating, and harvesting more hectares of corn. The case demonstrates local party authorities' power to impose their priorities on the collectives. The Isil'kul district leaders demanded that the farms served by the local MTS plant 1,700 *fewer* hectares than the 9,000 hectares the farms recommended. They justified this by presuming higher yields unlikely given the oblast's cool climate.[103] The files do not reveal the district bosses'

---

[102] Caroline Humphrey, *Marx Went Away – But Karl Stayed Behind*, rev. ed. of *Karl Marx Collective Farm: Economy, Society, and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 161.

[103] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 809a, ll. 44–46.

response to the inspector's April 6 report on the conflict, which favored the collective farms' case. This instance was exceptional because an envoy from Moscow interceded to resolve the dispute in favor of the collective farm and, not coincidentally, of planting more corn. Typically, when inspectors from Moscow or oblast affiliates intervened, local officials adopted their recommendation. In the unknown number of similar struggles between farms and their immediate superiors, unrecorded by inspectors, victory most likely went instead to the local authorities.

Often finding oblast aggregate plans calling for reduced corn plantings in 1956, inspectors moved to overrule local authorities. The leaders of Kurgan oblast in the Ural Mountains proposed that state farms plant approximately 2,300 fewer hectares than in 1955. Declaring that they had failed "to learn proper lessons from last year's failures," the inspector had "corrected" their "mistake," revising the plan to 70,000 hectares, an increase of 27.3 percent over the 1955.[104] A similar memorandum about the Estonian SSR describes the catastrophe of 1955 and measures to countermand the republic's attempt to curtail its quota for corn in 1956. The republic's inspectors visited farms and MTSs, finding the republic's ministry of agriculture incapable of managing agriculture. Reporting to superiors in Moscow, they described yields in 1955 of 7.8 metric tons of feed per hectare, far below the minimum of 25 tons considered necessary to ensure a favorable comparison to other feed crops.[105] As in Kurgan oblast, the Estonian leaders had attempted to slash corn plantings by half, a measure inspectors overrode.[106]

An inspection of the Latvian SSR revealed a similar decline, lending credence to the premise that, at first, officials interpreted the corn crusade as campaign lasting only for a year, which they could safely forget in 1956. The inspectors from Moscow criticized Nikonov and his

---

[104] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 809a, l. 88.

[105] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 809a, l. 96.

[106] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 809a, ll. 98 and 105.

ministry, concluding that it "has not yet become an operational aide in managing the republic's MTSs and collective farms."[107] The district soviets "treated formalistically" the process of approving the collectives' plans.[108] These facts combined to make them all guilty of allowing the republic's corn plantings to decline by half.[109] Summarizing district party secretaries' responses to the corn policy and the planning reform, party authorities noted, "Some communists . . . expressed doubts that the corn planting [plan] could be fulfilled." Echoing sentiments expressed in 1955, one in particular considered the corn policy "incorrect, unscientific . . . actions that contradict the directives of the January Central Committee plenum." [110] These few isolated responses demonstrate the futility of protest. If the collectives had actually possessed the authority to choose crop structures, then higher authorities could not have forced corn on them when they lacked the fertilizer and labor power to plant, cultivate, and harvest a crop so poorly adapted to the local climate and soil.

Addressing the Twentieth Party Congress on February 14, 1956, Khrushchev recapped his corn crusade's first year. His most momentous address to the gathering was his "Secret Speech" incriminating Stalin in all manner of crimes against members of the Communist Party. In the earlier speech, Khrushchev had stuck to more utilitarian themes: growing feed supplies had raised milk production by increasing output per dairy cow, in some cases severalfold. He denounced those he deemed responsible for poor harvests, and the same pitfalls against which he had warned as early as March 1955. Faintly praising a few regions, he delivered a biting critique of the majority: "In a considerable number of districts, corn did not provide satisfactory results. The only reason is the careless attitude of those districts' leaders toward its

[107] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 809a, l. 123.

[108] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 809a, l. 128.

[109] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 809a, l. 117.

[110] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 23, l. 22.

cultivation."[111] Having seen the reports on corn's high yields in the US, in Canada, and in certain cases in his own country, Khrushchev claimed that corn could not fail so long as collective farmers and local officials invested in growing it. Citing cases he considered evidence for his point, he again underscored the success the Lenin collective farm of the Chuvash ASSR, which he had praised in January 1955.

Far from moderating his demands in the face of unsatisfactory harvests in 1955, Khrushchev pressed on using the authority he had accumulated since demoting Malenkov. Not a conservative, Malenkov had represented an alternative interpretation of the reform consensus, and his caution had checked Khrushchev's more fanciful initiatives. While the First Secretary had to contend with rivals' positions before June 1957, Zubkova shows that his policies remained judicious and produced considerable results. As the influence of Malenkov and others waned, their ability to restrain Khrushchev diminished. Khrushchev's predictions and policy pronouncements, always optimistic, became excessively so, culminating in the boasts of rapid progress in agriculture. He thus drifted away from the agreement in favor of cautious reform reigning after Stalin's death and, in so doing, lost the moderates' support, precipitating the crisis of 1957.[112] Reaching a similar conclusion, Taubman writes that Khrushchev's dominance rendered him "defenseless against his own weaknesses and against entrenched bureaucratic resistance."[113]

The cumulative effect of the disappointing corn harvests of 1955 and 1956 nonetheless forced Khrushchev to reconsider his approach, diminishing pressure to plant corn in 1957 and 1958, perhaps as a conscious response to low yields and high losses. The total for 1956, 23.9 million hectares, fell to 18.3 million in 1957 before rebounding slightly to 19.7 in 1958. Only

---

[111] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:196.

[112] Zubkova, "Rivalry with Malenkov," 84.

[113] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 366.

afterward did it surge forward, reaching its peak in 1962.[114] In a statement characteristic of the period, Khrushchev admitted to one of the annual farmworkers' conferences that, although corn remained a priority, it was unprofitable and inferior to traditional crops unless it yielded some twenty-five metric tons of feed per hectare. This did not grant permission to abandon his favorite crop:

> Some might ask, "What's this, you're sounding a retreat? After constantly agitating for corn, now you say this about the issue." No, comrades, this is not a retreat. I consider corn the queen of the fields. No crop can compare to corn, but as it is a queen, it requires appropriate honor.[115]

Khrushchev thus indicated his own openness to tactical retreats from the principle that corn was a panacea for farms in every region, which he still believed should plant as much of it as possible. More cautious overall, he still used a favorite moniker for the crop, "the queen of the fields" thereby demonstrating that *his* enthusiasm for the crop had not at all flagged.

Khrushchev emerged stronger after surviving the attempt to oust him in 1957, which resulted from conflicts within the Presidium, including over corn. At a Presidium session in June, a majority of his rivals unexpectedly moved to demote him. Protesting, he called attention to long-disused formal rules requiring a personnel change to be ratified by the body that had originally confirmed it. He correctly considered that unlikely because he possessed wide support in the Central Committee, the required authority. He had controlled the Secretariat since 1953 and, with it, the authority to appoint secretaries of oblasts and republics. The Twentieth Party Congress had confirmed these appointees' seats in the Central Committee.[116] No one recorded the Presidium session, but Khrushchev's ally M. A. Suslov opened the subsequent plenum by recapping the proceedings from memory and from notes. The Central Committee plenum overruled the anti-Khrushchev coterie and expelled the ringleaders from the Presidium and

---

[114] Jasny, *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*, 142.

[115] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:368.

[116] Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR," 31.

Central Committee.

Malenkov, Molotov, and the others had attacked Khrushchev on two fronts. First, they focused on his leadership style and the atmosphere he had fostered within the Presidium and other high party organizations. They charged that collective leadership had disappeared, and a new cult of personality—Khrushchev's—had risen in place of Stalin's, denounced at the Twentieth Congress. They criticized as mere showmanship his treks around the country to inspect farms, factories, and everything else of interest. The publicity surrounding these tours contrasted with practices under Stalin, when he and other leaders had remained in Moscow.[117] Second, they criticized Khrushchev's frequent claims that the USSR was locked in competition with the United States to produce consumer goods, especially food. He had stated on May 22, 1957, that the USSR would "catch up with and overtake the United States of America in output of meat, butter, and milk per capita." Rejecting planners' estimates that the USSR might achieve this feat in 1975, he gave free rein to his optimism by naming a much nearer date. Most likely, he intended it as a motivational challenge, rather than a statement of fact. Redacted versions of the text published later repeat the phrase "in the next few years," but transcripts of the radio broadcast of the speech show that Khrushchev had specified a timeframe: 1960, or in the worst case, 1961.[118] The First Secretary relished political confrontation, and appealed outside the party oligarchy, to the masses, for the support he needed to confront entrenched bureaucratic constituencies. Publicizing grand promises to raise popular expectations, he heightened the elite's fears of popular discontent. He then presented his plans as the only way to satisfy the demands his own pledges had encouraged.[119]

Scholars have frequently considered the rhetoric of "catch up with and overtake

---

[117] N. Kovaleva, et al., eds. *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957: Stenogramma iiun'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1998), 26.

[118] Taubman provides the source—the radio transcript—for this version of the claim. Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 305–6 and 727, n. 22.

[119] Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, 12.

America" a focal point of the charges against Khrushchev in June 1957.[120] As recounted by Suslov, Malenkov attacked not the timeframe, but the slogan's unorthodox substitution of a focus on agriculture for the traditional emphasis on heavy industry.[121] In early 1955, Khrushchev had condemned Malenkov for this transgression against party dogma. Now Malenkov charged Khrushchev for making the same mistake, but Khrushchev had made the basic claim about competing with the US as early as February 1955, but it did not cause his rivals to react then. In a speech in Voronezh, he had told an audience of district party secretaries that the USSR "had entered a competition with the richest capitalist country in the world, the United States of America. We must work hard to overtake that country in the output of food items per capita."[122] In Moscow in April 1955, he had elaborated, "In the competition with America, comrades, there is no doubt that victory will be ours. This is because our economy is based on the teachings of Marx and Lenin, and develops without the bourgeoisie, the landowners, or the exploitation of man by man."[123]

* * *

Having survived the threat to his power, Khrushchev stood unchallenged in his authority. In October 1957, he forced the popular Marshal G. K. Zhukov, the wartime hero on whom he had relied for support in June, out of the Presidium for suspected political ambitions. Khrushchev also packed that body with supporters, promoting those who had been nonvoting candidates to full membership, and elevating new protégés to nonvoting status. Using his authority, he launched a major structural reform in agriculture, allowing collective farms to purchase from the state the machinery that had previously served them (at steep costs) as part

---

[120] For example, see: Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 110.

[121] Kovaleva, ed. *Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich*, 26

[122] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:69.

[123] Ibid., 2:101.

of the services offered by the MTSs. These measures did not proceed as planned during 1958, but Khrushchev's ability to abolish one of the Stalinist system's basic levers for controlling the countryside demonstrated his authority to secure approval for virtually any agrarian policy.

Khrushchev's relative caution about corn cultivation in 1957 and 1958 gave way to renewed expansion. At the Central Committee plenum of December 1958, he heralded corn and Soviet mastery of the industrial farming technologies he hoped to apply in the cornfields. His speech surveyed the achievements of his leadership in agriculture after five years. Additionally, he looked forward to the unprecedented Seven-Year Plan, slated for approval weeks later at the Twenty-first Party Congress. The plenum proved decisive because it relaunched Khrushchev's crusade, but with a new twist: he no longer considered it acceptable to cultivate corn with vast amounts of manual labor. Instead, the addition of more tractors and harvesters, as well as larger supplies of fertilizers and pesticides, promised more corn at lower cost than competing crops.

Khrushchev assured his listeners, "It is no exaggeration to say that rising yields and milk output, which completely satisfies demand for milk and dairy products has become possible owing to . . . corn." Yields in previous years, he conceded, had sufficed in the initial stages of adopting the crop, but larger harvests were vital. He further stressed that leaders in some regions had acted in "bureaucratic" and "irresponsive" ways in 1958, much as they had in previous years. Local organizers and experts had made unacceptable recommendations about planting. Citing a publication by researchers in Latvia, Khrushchev ridiculed its advice to plant a quantity of seed per hectare three to six times higher than that he considered optimal, leaving not one or two plants in a cluster, but five or six. This situation ensured that the plants crowded each other out, collectively growing less, not more, green mass than two plants together. He charged that local bosses shrugged off the resulting low yields by claiming that corn would not grow in the republic. "But how could it possibly grow when planted in such a way?" he asked

indignantly.[124] The published version of the speech omits a telling exchange between Khrushchev and the Latvian party chief that followed. The First Secretary said to his audience: "I looked over at Comrade Kalnberzin and he looked straight at the floor. We are friends and our gazes should meet, but [our points of view] have, so to speak, parted ways on the matter of corn."[125] When the Latvian leader admitted shame at his republic's failures in corngrowing, Khrushchev further badgered him: "One cannot feed people on shame." He thundered, "Let's have corn instead, because today it is shameful and tomorrow it is shameful, but that furnishes neither meat nor milk."[126] Returning to his speech, Khrushchev denounced officials who did not go out into the fields to see and understand, remaining in their offices. From there, they only demanded reports that, while giving the appearance of leadership, told them nothing about actual progress in growing a corn crop.[127]

Officials who addressed the plenum emphasized the critical importance of using machines in producing crops, especially corn. This was the scene of Khrushchev's exchange with A. V. Gitalov, the tractor driver who traveled to Iowa to work on Garst's farm. Gitalov characterized the machines and other technologies he had mastered there, all of which saved time, labor, and money—hallmarks of industrial farming. Khrushchev ordered the man to consult with engineers and designers in hopes that his observations might improve the design of new Soviet machines.[128]

The Seven-Year Plan Khrushchev launched in January 1959 prioritized machines, a

---

[124] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 3:383–84. Notably, Khrushchev's recommendation directly contradicted the teachings of T. D. Lysenko, who once held that plants of the same species cooperated, rather than competing for light, water, and nutrients.

[125] The Russian noun, *vzgliad*, has multiple meanings, which permitted Khrushchev a play on words here. A single instance of the word signifies both the physical act of seeing, which I have translated as "gaze," while equally denoting one's "point of view" on an issue.

[126] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 341, l. 106.

[127] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 3:385.

[128] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 345, l. 129.

vision he outlined in a speech to the Twenty-first Party Congress. He boasted of Soviet economic growth rates that exceeded those of the capitalist countries, presuming that they might continue or even accelerate. To achieve this in agriculture, he pledged new tractors, harvesters, and other machines, but at a rate of investment lower than over the previous five years.[129] Maintaining that procurement and tax reforms had strengthened the collective farms, Khrushchev explained that the farms themselves would make up the difference in direct state contributions by investing from their income. They were, in fact, already purchasing their machines from the MTS.[130] Over the seven years of the new plan, he stated, the agricultural sector would achieve 8 percent annual growth.[131] In practical terms, this meant raising yields per hectare to improve both grain harvests and productivity of livestock; not coincidentally, both of these might result from more effective corn cultivation. The policies sought to raise the output a unit of labor and of capital produced while decreasing costs, goals that required machines, chemicals, and other industrial farming technologies. The formal document outlining the Seven-Year Plan clarified that the USSR would achieve targets by expanding irrigation systems, and using "scientifically based systems of land management" to select crops and practices suited to each region. In practice, the latter provided cover for eliminating hay and pastures and replacing them with industrially farmed row crops, particularly corn. The plan pledged to remedy longstanding shortages of synthetic fertilizers by producing 31 million metric tons in 1965, compared to the output of 10.3 million in 1958. It called for Soviet factories to manufacture more than 1 million tractors and

---

[129] During that span, the state had expended 100 billion rubles on capital investment. Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 3:472. This equaled $250 million in 1959, or $1.97 billion in 2012. A note on money: in 1961, the Soviet government revalued the ruble, redenominating it at a rate of 1:10. Throughout, I have given the ruble in the figure appropriate for the year unless otherwise noted.

[130] In 1958, state investment was 266 percent of the 1953 figure. This dropped in 1959, only to recover beginning in 1961. Collective farms increased investment to meet this shortfall. McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 137. Khrushchev had long advocated for amalgamating farms. Where farms were already large, as in southern regions, this reached a logical end when one MTS served one combined collective. Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 86. As early as 1951, economists V. G. Venzher and A. V. Sanina had proposed eliminating the MTS altogether, an idea Stalin adamantly rejected. Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 33.

[131] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 3:474.

400,000 harvesters, as well as electric-powered laborsaving devices used in milking and related tasks. Corn also found its way into the sanctified document, enabling ambitious targets for grain production and feed, necessary to satisfy growing demand for meat and dairy products.[132]

The rates of investment the document forecast, as well as subsequent policies, proved inadequate to achieving Khrushchev's lofty goals. Contemporary Sovietologists interpreted his frequent speeches to reinforce the priority of agriculture as a sign of struggle against a faction favoring heavy and defense industries.[133] Khrushchev was clearly skeptical of those who maintained the orthodoxy that privileged those spheres, but he never advocated limitless investments in agriculture. Consequently, he did not have to struggle against an opposition on this front. This accords with historian Miriam Dobson's idea that changing policies reflected not interpersonal or factional conflict, but subtle shifts of the group consensus.[134] Khrushchev moved from the conservative stance in favor of heavy industry he held during the struggle against Malenkov to a moderate one favoring some reprioritization toward light industry and agriculture. This was enough to put him at odds with some conservatives, but not to provoke open conflict.[135] Wanting to achieve success in both areas at minimum cost, Khrushchev invested in modernizing heavy industry and infrastructure. He concurrently sought more agricultural output through campaigns for efficiency, for better use of what he considered unused latent productive capacity, and for the USSR to increase output at a rate higher than the growth in capital investment.[136]

In April 1959, Khrushchev already had new ideas, which he dictated in a memo to his

---

[132] "Kontrol'nye tsifry plana razvitiia narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR na 1959–1965 gody," *Pravda* (February 8, 1959), 4.

[133] See, for example: Hahn, *Politics of Soviet Agriculture*, 4.

[134] Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*, 157–58.

[135] William J. Tompson, "Industrial Management and Economic Reform," in *Khrushchev*, ed. Khrushchev, Taubman, and Gleason, 154.

[136] Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, 120–21.

agricultural advisors cataloguing instructions on a range of issues, including mechanizing corn cultivation. He deemed that previous achievements in developing hybrid seeds and in other spheres reinforced his commitment to solving chronic fodder shortages with corn. The next step was machinery [*tekhnika*]: "The American example has already proven how to use composite mechanization; that is, planting, cultivation, and harvest is carried out only by machine operators." Gitalov's apprenticeship on Garst's farm proved this, as did those who mastered this method at home. Khrushchev demanded more machines, better guidelines for using them, and more competent farm leaders. Those who proved adaptable and capable should take the places of "incapable and bureaucratized [*obiurokrativshiesia*] people."[137]

Although occasionally skeptical of sanguine pictures of progress, Khrushchev's enthusiasm won out that day. Considering the Virgin Lands, he decided that corn might join the wheat grown over the previous five seasons on the Kazakh steppe, permitting livestock herds to expand. "I was especially gladdened," he continued, "when I viewed the [documentaries] *Animal Husbandry in the Virgin Lands*, *Corn Has Become Siberian*, and *Corn in Kazakhstan*, showing that corn produces very good results . . . where they plant and properly care for it."[138] Comparing the region's dryland conditions to the US's Great Plains, he saw potential for corn where a more cautious evaluation would find the "queen of the fields" wanting and choose other crops, such as sorghum, better adapted to low-rainfall conditions.

Regardless of Khrushchev's grandiose vision of modern, technological farms outlined in the Seven-Year Plan, reality did not live up to those expectations. He demanded more machines, a path to high yields of corn. Sown grains, such as wheat and barley, required no cultivation during the growing season, saving labor. Corn's extra productivity had to be purchased with the advance of more labor to eliminate weeds. Land, labor, and other resources remained underutilized without the machines needed to plant corn, remove weeds, and harvest the crop.

---

[137] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 298, ll. 91–92

[138] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 298, l. 94.

Despite Khrushchev's many demands, Soviet factories produced far fewer of these machines than required because of deficiencies rooted deep in the bureaucratic system. When he inquired in the late 1950s, he received assurances that the stock of machines fulfilled needs, but in fact, it did not. Because of this falsehood, planners trimmed production, retooling for other purposes the factories heretofore producing agricultural machines. When Khrushchev learned of the shortage, it shocked him. In 1957, annual production of corn harvesters was 55,000, the fruit of efforts to boost their production in 1955. By 1960, this had fallen to a mere 13,000, even as the cropland devoted to corn expanded again toward the 30 million hectares Khrushchev originally demanded. Historian Anatolii Strelianyi concludes that that no matter how often Khrushchev agitated for this pet project, as soon as he turned his attention from any part of it, that component quickly went off the rails.[139] Only his frequent, direct intervention could maintain satisfactory performance. Even in the best-case scenario portrayed in official statistics, the USSR remained short of the US in numbers of farm machines.[140]

The revelation that his demands for machinery had fallen victim to the distortions of the system and the duplicitous actions of managers he trusted encouraged Khrushchev to reorganize structures, returning to familiar methods for disciplining the bureaucracy. He stripped the various ministries of agriculture of administrative functions remaining after the planning reform of 1955. He replaced USSR Minister of Agriculture V. V. Matskevich with a string of successors, each owing everything to the leader who headed party *and* government after 1958. Concluding

---

[139] Anatolii Strelianyi, "Khrushchev and the Countryside," in *Khrushchev*, ed. Khrushchev, Taubman, and Gleason, 121. McCauley cites data on machinery production that reinforces this conclusion. Tractor and combine production more than doubled between 1953 and 1958, but fell in 1959, held steady in 1960, and rebounded to the 1958 level only in 1961. In output of trucks, vital contributors to timely transport of the harvest without waste, the total fell from 150% the 1953 figure in 1958 to only 75% in 1959. It surpassed this latter level only once between 1960 and 1964. McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 137.

[140] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 298, l. 191. This report found that American farmers possessed between three and four times as many tractors, trucks, and similar machines. Comparing the USSR on August 1, 1959, with the US at the close of 1958, Soviet farms possessed 1,033,000 tractors, while American farmers owned 4,729,000. Even in the more advantageous comparison measured in standard 15-horsepower units, the Soviet deficit remained: 1,790,000 compared to 5,250,000. Additionally, the USSR had more cropland, meaning that the ratio of tractors to hectares was even further in American farmers' favor.

that American models influenced the reorganizations, Roy and Zhores Medvedev suggested that they had potential because they offered local authorities more initiative, but the bureaucracy carried out these reforms in a haphazard manner, which furthered the post-1960 sense of failure.[141] Khrushchev then sought to move the ministry from its headquarters, a masterpiece of constructivist architecture built in 1933 on the Moscow's Garden Ring, to a state farm in the surrounding oblast. There, its personnel were to run a model farm to demonstrate advanced technology, in addition to fulfilling their reduced administrative duties. Facilities on the farm remained unsatisfactory, and many lacked offices. Reluctant to abandon prestigious and comfortable apartments in the city for the rough conditions of the farm, personnel daily commuted long distances over poor roads. Tellingly, a year after the moves, some 75 percent of the more than 2,000 of the USSR ministry's personnel had sought new employment elsewhere. The RSFSR ministry and those of the republics' ministries underwent similar relocation.[142]

Khrushchev's inspiration for this and similar moves owed much to American precedents. The model farms to which the ministries of agriculture moved drew on the United States Department of Agriculture facility at Beltsville, MD, outside Washington DC, and Iowa State University in Ames, both of which he visited in 1959. He spoke approvingly of the Americans' decentralized system. Funded by individual states, the faculties of land-grant universities and agricultural colleges collaborated with extension services to provide practical advice to farmers, a contrast to the endless, seemingly mindless orders Khrushchev saw emanating from his own bureaucracies. In fact, he first learned of the idea in 1955 from the Soviet agricultural delegation, which reported to him on its return about the Iowa State College, as the university was known until July 1959. The town of Ames was in an agricultural region, and students worked on its model farm. The USSR's Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Khrushchev complained, was

---

[141] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 111.

[142] Ibid., 112.

located on central Moscow's Miasnitskaia Street, scarcely a kilometer from the Kremlin.[143] He later acknowledged the American influence, stating in February 1964 that he had "borrowed" from America in designing his reforms of the scientific-research apparatus and efforts to put the academics' findings to work in production. In particular, he praised the agricultural colleges and their extension services.[144] These reforms attempted to move the USSR's agricultural education institutions to specialized small towns, Soviet mirrors of Ames, where students would have a connection to the land lacking in Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv, or other cities.

The academy escaped the fate of the ministries of agriculture, but Khrushchev had hoped to make a similar example of Moscow's Timiriazev Agricultural Academy, the USSR's most prestigious training and research institution. Although it had once stood on the city's outskirts, the sprawling metropolis was closing in on it. Khrushchev proposed to move it "from the asphalt to the land," to a site in his native Kursk oblast. He attempted to remedy a longstanding problem presented by tens of thousands of trained agronomists and other specialists who shunned work down on the farm in favor of administrative posts in towns and cities. In 1953, the figure of those active on farms or working for the MTS was only 96,000 of the 1 million trained technicians. In the mid 1950s, Khrushchev moved to improve rural living standards, and the total consequently rose to 280,000. When he abolished the MTSs in 1958, however, the attractiveness of that employment, which had been accompanied by status as a state employee, diminished, and the specialists' numbers declined anew. Considering this a problem of training, Khrushchev proposed to solve it by transplanting the educational institutions where they earned their qualifications to the countryside. There, practical, hands-on education on the model of an American college might disabuse students of their disdain for assignments in rural areas. This plan led to success in building new training centers outside the city, but old ones, such as Timiriazev, remained without moving until after Khrushchev's fall, largely due to the enormous

---

[143] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 199.

[144] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 8:478.

costs associated with constructing new facilities.[145]

Khrushchev did not stop there in reorganizing, as he advanced plans to challenge the party and government bureaucracies he blamed for the disasters surrounding the Riazan affair. He placed his hopes in empowering their local levels and streamlining management. Consolidating the districts (*raiony*), he created new territorial production administrations specifically for administering agriculture, and charged them with competent, hands-on leadership responsive to local conditions and concerns. In practice, they proved too large to administer the increased numbers of people and farms, especially in light of unreliable roads and telephone communications common in the Soviet Union's rural areas.[146] Throughout these reorganizations, corn remained: Khrushchev devoted his speeches to it less frequently than in 1955, but it continued to be a priority after 1960. Far from declining in importance, corn officially surpassed 28 million hectares in 1960 and reached its apogee, more than 37 million hectares, in 1962.[147]

* * *

In addition to tinkering with the bureaucracy, Khrushchev frequently grew dissatisfied with those he had placed in charge of agriculture. Recent scholarship on the Presidium and the First Secretary's inner circle after 1957 demonstrates that he designated officials to assume responsibility for various policy areas. This included a Central Committee secretary to oversee agriculture, but he also frequently interfered with this work. Tiring of each individual in turn, he expelled them from the top of the party hierarchy just as quickly as he had promoted them; he did so with A. I. Kirichenko, an old associate from the Ukrainian days, and N. I. Beliaev, a hero of the Virgin Lands campaign. A key backer of Khrushchev in 1957, Kirichenko fell far and fast in

---

[145] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 115.

[146] Ibid., 155. See also: Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 518.

[147] Jasny, *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*, 142.

1960, first to secretary of Rostov oblast and then to director of a factory in Penza oblast.[148] Khrushchev similarly drove Beliaev from Moscow, appointing him first secretary of the party central committee in Kazakhstan. He constantly sought men who could meet his demands for competent managers, so he turned to state farm directors or party secretaries of agricultural oblasts to fill positions in Moscow, including minister of agriculture. Such was the story of I. P. Volovchenko, decorated director of a state farm in Lipetsk oblast whom Khrushchev plucked from relative obscurity to become chief of a diminished ministry in March 1963.[149]

Those, such as Kirichenko, Beliaev, or G. I. Voronov, who sought greater independence or fomented intrigues fell quickly, or suffered due to the intrigues of others. As historian A. V. Sushkov's meticulous study of the Presidium in this period shows, they all failed to keep power for a common reason: each lost the confidence of Khrushchev, the only one whose vote counted.[150] The First Secretary's overwhelming control over the fates of his advisors left them insecure, making their decision to force him into retirement before he could demote them the only logical one. In the meantime, they endured the threat of his dissatisfaction, always attentive to his moods. First secretary of the party in Ukraine in 1963 and 1964, P. E. Shelest recounted in his memoir several episodes when he escorted Khrushchev on inspections of the republic's farms and factories. As soon as the First Secretary had departed, the phone would ring; L. I. Brezhnev and N. V. Podgornyi, Shelest's predecessor and patron, would call from Moscow to inquire about any remarks Khrushchev had made about them or about Kremlin politics.[151] The later antagonism between Shelest and Brezhnev warrant caution in considering the memoir when it involves Khrushchev's successor, but Shelest's description of the uncertainty and machinations fits with the atmosphere apparent in the inner circle. Even Brezhnev and

---

[148] For more on Kirichenko's rise and fall, see: Sushkov, *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, 226–28.

[149] For more on Volovchenko, see the biographical note in: *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, 2:839–40.

[150] Sushkov, *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, 248.

[151] P. E. Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete: Dnevnikovye zapisi, vospominaniia chlena Politburo TsK KPSS* (Moscow: Edition Q, 1995), 173, 181–87, and 200–2.

Podgornyi, among the five most powerful men in the USSR, feared Khrushchev and endeavored to avoid his ire by anticipating his moods and preferences. Given the rapid dismissal of aides who failed to achieve success in carrying out policy, everyone around Khrushchev had ample motivation to consider appearances first. It paid to show him the productive cornfields and well-run farms, while concealing "shortcomings," no matter how glaring and numerous.

Notwithstanding the tense atmosphere in the Presidium, historians have found no evidence of organized factional struggles or coalitions before that which deposed Khrushchev. Mining archival and memoir sources, Sushkov concludes that no matter how dissatisfied, those around the First Secretary formed no permanent groups, a finding at odds with the Sovietologists who deduced constant struggle.[152] Grievances simmered and temporary alliances formed, but no hardline or reform wings existed. Neither M. A. Suslov nor F. R. Kozlov, both considered potential alternatives or successors, possessed the authority to form a power base. Only the collaboration of Brezhnev, Podgornyi, and all the others to oust Khrushchev in 1964 broke this truce, but their actions carried less danger of retribution from the leader because it enjoyed nearly universal support and the First Secretary almost willfully disregarded the sporadic warnings he received of a looming challenge to his power.[153]

Yet even in 1964, when party and government constituencies were lining up against him, Khrushchev possessed the authority to determine the boundaries of policy debate. As was his habit, he dictated memoranda to the Presidium with increasing frequency, conveying observations made during travels and proposals for rectifying pressing problems such as the chronic shortage of synthetic fertilizer.[154] Scholars sometimes interpreted this as a sign of weakness, which necessitated attempts to influence an opposition from which he was unable to

---

[152] Sushkov, *Prezidium TsK KPSS*, 248.

[153] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 6-7 and 615.

[154] For example, see: Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 8:105–13.

get approval for further agricultural reforms.[155] Events in 1964 demonstrated that he continued to dictate these documents and, thereby, to define the terms of policy debate.[156] In the stenographer's records of the February 1964 Central Committee plenum, Khrushchev's protégé Volovchenko delivered the main address on issues the First Secretary deemed important: industrial farming techniques including machinery, irrigation, land management, and more. His occasional interruptions demonstrate that, far from needing to defend his power, he used his authority to shape policy.[157] His unpopular move to split party committees and apparatuses into agricultural and industrial wings joined other measures to finally ruin his credibility. Although his successors scrapped that reform and returned to the more orthodox styles, Khrushchev had set the boundaries for what was possible while he remained in office, and ingrained industrial agriculture into Soviet practice.

* * *

Between the Central Committee plenums of September 1953 and January 1955, Khrushchev determined the terms of debate over agricultural policy, setting boundaries within which the only question was of how to pursue his initiatives. The authority Khrushchev developed in pursuing the Virgin lands campaign permitted him to preach his corn crusade, forcing farms in every region to plant the crop in 1955. Party discipline required officials to demonstrate compliance with the moment's initiative by parroting slogans: "Plant corn!" "Plow up virgin land!" "Catch up with and overtake America!" Officials groomed in the system Khrushchev inherited from Stalin acted this part on the assumption that attention would soon

---

[155] McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 136.

[156] He wrote memoranda in June and July 1964 that sparked anger among his underlings, but which were not published until recently. McCauley interpreted the apparent silence because the memos were unpublished as a sign of Khrushchev's weakness in his final months in power. These included a much reviled proposal to launch a new Eight-Year Plan when the existing Seven-Year Plan (1959–1965) expired. See: Artizov, ed., *Nikita Khrushchev*, 14–42 and 44–51.

[157] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 711, l. 26.

move to a new proposal, allowing them to do as they pleased. Khrushchev had to struggle to convince administrators at all levels that corn would not disappear after a season, but had come to reign as "the queen of the fields." Especially after 1958, Khrushchev promoted industrial methods for growing corn and many other crops, and his ability to determine these policies shows that his authority remained intact until 1964.

For the sake of expediency, officials *appeared* to implement policies on corn, but frequently did so with little care for details required to ensure success. On some farms, plantings existed merely "on paper." Some outstanding farms actually grew impressive yields of corn and produced large quantities of meat and milk, examples that improved the image of an oblast or republic. In many cases, farms planted corn, allowing authorities to satisfy statisticians and inspectors, but they devoted little labor to weeding it and harvesting it, ensuring that the crop yielded little. The heads of oblasts, districts, and farms declined to protest against the policy of planting corn, but their disregard for the crop demonstrates that they shared little of Khrushchev's faith that it was the solution to requirements for livestock feed. By 1964, their skepticism had turned into a reservoir of discontent, emboldening those who dismissed the crusade as merely another of Khrushchev's "harebrained schemes." Yet the doubts many harbored, expressed silently in evasion and dissimulation that this and subsequent chapters document, harmed Khrushchev's corn program and, by extension, his reforms to remake the USSR's agricultural economy on industrial lines. Unconvinced that corn could grow in their locale, leaders neglected it even in areas where it could grow productively, contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

CHAPTER 3

TECHNOLOGIES OF CORN: INSTITUTIONS AND IMPLEMENTING POLICY UNDER KHRUSHCHEV

Nikita Khrushchev frequently expressed displeasure with republic, oblast, and district leaders who lacked enthusiasm for his agricultural policies. As a case in point, A. A. Nikonov was fired from the post of minister of agriculture of the Latvian SSR because of an audience with Khrushchev. Although the republic had been reprimanded for protesting the planting of corn in 1955, Nikonov remained minister in 1959, when Khrushchev, on one of his many inspection tours around the USSR, stopped in Latvia. Castigating Nikonov, he charged that the minister "did not love corn." During an ensuing dialogue lasting an hour and a half, the party boss changed his tone, if not his opinion. While unconvinced by Nikonov's data showing that corn grew poorly in Latvia's cool, wet climate, Khrushchev listened attentively, resulting in a "constructive and calm" conversation. Nikonov later wrote that, despite the sympathy with which the First Secretary had apparently heard him out, he lost his post because of the meeting.[1] That did not happen until late 1960, however, when he was reassigned to an agricultural research institute.[2] Nikonov's fate nonetheless shows how officials felt pressured to convince superiors that they had devoted themselves to corn.

For officials, even mild objections might result in censure or, if repeated, removal from their government or party posts. In early 1954, for instance, Khrushchev ousted the leaders of the Kazakh SSR after they dragged their feet in backing his Virgin Lands scheme.[3] Later, leaders

---

[1] Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 303.

[2] Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 108.

[3] Khrushchev demoted the head of the government of Kazakhstan, Zh. Sh. Shaiakhmetov, whom McCauley describes as having a "cool attitude" toward Khrushchev's scheme. McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, 61.

ensnared in scandals similar to the Riazan affair suffered demotion. There were repercussions for being insufficiently enthusiastic about Moscow's policies, or for standing out in ways that cast the party, the government, or Khrushchev in a negative light. The consequences of such missteps were no longer deadly, as they had been under Stalin. The threat of that past period of repression still hung over officials and society, but once the leaders had disavowed terror, it lost some of its power lower-level party functionaries.[4]

The Presidium, Central Committee, and Council of Ministers drew up formal policies and enacted directives, but these alone did not guarantee the desired outcome. As Breslauer aptly put it, "Policy is not the same as results." The rigid bureaucracy inherited from Stalin impeded Khrushchev's attempts to put his vision into practice, hampering efforts to secure his objectives.[5] His speeches and policies promoting corn illustrate his will to pursue the corn crusade to its logical end, if not beyond; however, the bureaucracies created hindrances that account in part for the disappointing results. This chapter sheds light on how economic ministries responded to policies designed to spread industrial practices for growing corn. In 1955, Soviet leaders ordered factories to produce tens of thousands of specialized machines for planting, cultivating, and harvesting corn. They also invested resources in ventures to create double-cross hybrid corn seeds, drawing directly on American knowhow; by the end of the 1950s, they achieved enough success to provide seeds for a substantial percentage of all corn plantings.

This chapter explores the strength of and limits on Khrushchev's authority, or ability to use the party and state bureaucracies to particular ends, especially in the period between 1955 and 1958. Integral to the Soviet system, the party apparat and the ministries that ruled individual economic spheres shaped the corn crusade's outcomes. Party organizations

---

[4] The case for viewing the Great Purge of the latter 1930s at least in part as a chaotic method for making management orderly can be found in: Wendy Z. Goldman, *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin: The Social Dynamics of Repression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[5] Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, 116.

permeated agencies, coordinating everyday economic affairs. Reversing Stalin's wartime and postwar mandate requiring the party to concentrate on overtly political and ideological matters, Khrushchev demanded that it actively manage the economy. Scholars have considered this a ploy in his struggle against Malenkov, whose power derived from the ministries. By contrast, political historian Yoram Gorlizki has argued that this offensive against the centralized ministries inherited from Stalin in fact was a consensus view among the leaders, who hoped to reform them into responsive tools for executing policy.[6] Gorlizki concludes that this was not merely a product of the power struggle or of Khrushchev's "erratic and unpredictable temperament."[7]

Bureaucracies portray themselves as orderly formal hierarchies; Soviet party and government organizations were no exception. Concluding that they operated differently in practice would add little to the scholarly conversation on Khrushchev-era reform. Looking behind the façade of bureaucratic regularity, this chapter instead reveals formal regulations, unofficial procedures, personal relationships, and stopgap measures that concurrently permitted the system to function and constrained its ability to do so in an orderly manner. Scholars have described how individuals used such methods to their own ends; however, enterprises and organizations also employed them, especially to meet the plan's demands for output. Sociologist Alena Ledeneva terms these features "self-subversive" because they permitted individuals to function within the system, but in greasing the wheels they undermined the formal procedures that might have made them operate smoothly.[8]

---

[6] Yoram Gorlizki, "Anti-Ministerialism and the USSR Ministry of Justice, 1953–56: A Study in Organizational Decline," *Europe–Asia Studies* 48, no. 8 (December 1996), 1282.

[7] Ibid., 1307. Gorlizki thus differs subtly from those historians saw Khrushchev as the head of an insurgent, pro-party movement that advanced an alternative vision of the roles of party and government. See, for example: Aksiutin and Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo*.

[8] Drawing on interviews and textual references, Ledeneva sheds light on practices known in Russian as *blat*, developing an ethnography of pervasive but hidden maneuvers to "use personal networks and informal contacts to obtain goods and services in short supply and to find a way around formal procedures." Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favors:* Blat*, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1. Individuals used connections (*sviazy*) and acquaintance

Ministerial and local officials impaired Khrushchev's vision of corn and industrial farming by inertia and subterfuge. Khrushchev countered with antibureaucracy rhetoric that pinned a variety of epithets on these practices, and then was amplified in the press. Published sources and internal documents alike used the terms *po shablonu* or *shablonno* to denounce administration "by formula," with little thought for practical outcomes. They similarly denounced *formalizm* (excessive concern for outward appearance, rather than results), *ochkovtiratel'stvo* (duplicity, deceit), *pripiski* (distorting records by adding fictional production or work), *obman gosudarstva* (deceiving the government), *biurokratizm*, and the related *volokita* (red tape). Not exhaustive, this list leaves out a number of practices, such as bribery, that were likely prevalent but did not feature in antibureaucracy discourses or the inspection reports shedding light on such actions. I have selected cases that illuminate the tension between pressures on officials to fulfill orders from above, to defend their own authority, and to fortify their own job security.

Khrushchev's struggles against the bureaucracy constituted an attempt to smooth the erratic operation of the state economy and its command-administrative machinery. In theory, central authorities directed local officials, who then controlled their subordinates, down to farm managers and party secretaries. Responding to Khrushchev's demands to plant more corn, party and state officials increased the annual allotment of cropland to corn fivefold in 1955, and more then tenfold over the ten years to 1964. The corn crusade could not have reached such scope and scale without the control permitted by this system, a legacy of Stalin that had developed over decades, but which was also evolving as Khrushchev reasserted the party's role in the economy.

One strain of scholarly opinion credits the bureaucracy with dampening Khrushchev's supposedly ill-conceived initiatives, achieving a net positive. Historian Anatolyi Strelianyi lauds the bureaucracy for preventing disastrous outcomes that, in his judgment, might have resulted

---

(*znakomstvo*) to achieve private ends, securing a visit to a better doctor, entrance to a prestigious university, exclusive theater tickets, or any of a hundred other necessities, the nature of which varied according to an individual's social position.

from fully executing Khrushchev's policies. He further argues that efforts to decentralize did not alter the system's basic mode of operation. For all the antipathy Khrushchev voiced toward the party and government bureaucracies, the influence he did have on policy outcomes flowed through them. In considering the corn crusade, Strelianyi writes, "If the apparat had delayed in carrying out [Khrushchev's] decisions, the harvests would have been greater. . . . As far as possible, the apparat and in particular its lower reaches adapted [the corn policies] to real conditions, otherwise the results would have been even more deplorable."[9] Writing years later in his capacity as an agricultural historian, A. A. Nikonov agrees that it had the authority and flexibility to pursue specific ends, be they the leader's or its own. In contrast to Strelianyi, he maintains that Khrushchev needed the officials in charge of agricultural policy, but they disregarded useful orders, ensuring negative outcomes. "The party apparat had been established," he concludes, to make it "capable of overseeing [policy implementation], and was properly selected and well schooled." He concedes that they often failed in this mission, resulting in chaos, and argues that even these organizations' earnest efforts did Khrushchev's corn initiative "more harm than good." Acting "according to formula" (*po shablonu*), authorities pressed this and other "panaceas" on subordinates in response to the irresistible agitation to plant corn after the January 1955 Central Committee plenum.[10]

Wrangling with the bureaucracy, Khrushchev found that achieving his aims proved difficult. Republic, oblast, district, and farm authorities followed directives with greater regard for appearance than for substantive results. Strelianyi correctly concludes that this was not "resistance," a conscious or programmatic effort to reverse them; however, common tactics did hinder Khrushchev's ability to carry through a policy to fruition. Strelianyi describes these as a collective "frame of mind" that drove officials to discount orders from Moscow they considered

---

[9] Strelianyi, "Khrushchev and the Countryside," 131–32.

[10] Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 302.

impracticable, pursing the expected ends through effective, if unauthorized means.[11]

Relying on archival records of central inspectorates and oblast authorities, this chapter gives special attention to forms of reporting outside normal party and government channels, where failures and delays revealed themselves more frequently. This includes the records of the Ministry of Government Oversight (*Ministerstvo gosudarstvennogo kontrolia*),[12] and the party information network that allowed officials and members to report abuses. Newspapers similarly could criticize individuals or local circumstances, but not the leaders, their policies, or basic principles of the Soviet system. My approach assumes a significant risk of overemphasizing breakdowns and underrepresenting the normal functioning of the system. Given the nature of the archival record, I make no effort to quantify the scope of frauds, inefficiencies, and malfunctions, but their prevalence in the archival record, in contemporary denunciations by Khrushchev and other prominent figures, and in memoir accounts suggests that they were common.

Violations and punishments prove difficult to quantify because each administrative region had its own office that coordinated activities with superiors only on large-scale inspection campaigns. A brief characterization of the activities of the USSR inspectorate will clarify the scope and scale of inspections. In 1959, the USSR Commission for Government Oversight, successor to the ministry of the same name, carried out many inspections of farms and enterprises related to agriculture. Twenty-three multiregion and multirepublic inspections focused on major directives resulting from the Twenty-first Party Congress, the Central Committee plenum of December 1958, and joint decisions of the Central Committee and Council of Ministers. Encompassing broad geographic areas, these undertakings involved personnel from local inspectorates working alongside officials sent from Moscow. They collated findings

[11] Strelianyi, "Khrushchev and the Countryside," 132.

[12] For the early years of the corn crusade (to 1957), these are primarily in GARF, f. R-8300. From 1957 to 1962, it was the Commission for Government Oversight, found in GARF, f. R-9477.

into reports about districts, oblasts, and krais, and those into reports for republics, and then into a summary for the whole USSR. Procedure required government and party authorities at each level to pass resolutions designed to remedy any negligence discovered. In 1959, inspections covered nearly 2,000 agriculture-related sites across seventy oblasts, krais, and republics, including 829 collective farms, 510 state farms, procurement facilities, construction projects, and research institutes.[13] Union-wide inspections resulted in the punishment of only 115 individuals: of these, only 27 were fired, and 25 earned "strict reprimands," a warning that left them only one misstep from dismissal.[14] In addition, the organization also investigated letters of complaint, or directed them to the relevant local party committee or inspectorate: the commission received 197 in all about agricultural issues. It investigated 50 while redirecting the remaining 147 to other offices. The majority of these called attention to common problems, such as abuse of power, theft of state property, waste, fraudulent accounting practices, and violations of the collective farm charter.[15] These figures show that the number of inspections was inconsequential in comparison to the vast size of the USSR. Even accounting for those carried out by regional inspectorates, they seem insufficient to have had more than a minimal deterrent on officials.

* * *

In 1954 and 1955, Khrushchev frequently decried lethargy and inefficiency, spurring the bureaucracy into action. The Soviet mass media followed his lead, as evidenced by an editorial cartoon from the March 27, 1955, edition of *Pravda* that combined an image (figure 4) with a text to convey two topical messages. It reads, "In the struggle for high yields of corn, we must ensure . . . [*sic*] that there are more cobs like this one [at left] and fewer like this! [at right]."

[13] GARF, f. R-9477, op. 1, d. 369, l. 1.

[14] GARF, f. R-9477, op. 1, d. 369, l. 11.

[15] GARF, f. R-9477, op. 1, d. 368, l. 14.

Given that Khrushchev had launched the corn crusade only two months before, the image renewed the common call for attention to the new, unfamiliar crop on which he staked so much. It also typified the attack on the phenomenon pictured at right, where the "cob" burst not with kernels that would produce meat and milk, but bureaucrats who stood in the way. They crowded around a conference table, churning out "resolutions" and "orders" that kept subordinates busy on paperwork, instead of out in the fields offering practical aid and advice to the farmers. This reminded audiences that Khrushchev's campaign against the ministries and their endemic red tape continued apace, in parallel with his agricultural initiatives.

Figure 4: D. Fomichev, "Untitled," *Pravda* (March 27, 1955): 4.

Soviet newspapers, Khrushchev's speeches, and his personal example of hands-on leadership together formed a critique of the bureaucrats responsible for implementing policy.[16] The Central Committee left no doubt about the importance of corn in an April 1956 letter to each

[16] Notable for its publication in *Pravda*, this cartoon joined many others as part of the antibureaucracy campaign that was especially strident in 1954. See, for instance, M. Abramov, "Pozitsiia 'udobnaia,' no vrednaia," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (June 8, 1954): 2; M. Abranov, "Ufimskii meteor," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (April 25, 1954): 4; M. Abramov, "Biurokraticheskii 'posevnoi agregat,'" *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (May 25, 1954): 2. Although all condemn officials for failing to carry out needed measures, one cartoon in particular calls attention corn. V. Ivanov, "Kukuruza kantseliarskaia," *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (June 23, 1954): 2.

oblast in the RSFSR, which highlighted reports of "major shortcomings" in preparing for the spring planting then underway. It sternly reminded, "First secretaries of oblast and krai committees are required to personally direct corn planting."[17] It demanded that they mimic Khrushchev's approach to leading, for example by conducting on-the-spot inspections and understanding the details of production techniques, rather than exercising control from a distance through directives and reports.

The Soviet system worked only when officials executed Moscow's orders. Local agricultural and party officials who did not do so faced withering criticism. For instance, in early 1955 the Central Committee condemned the authorities in the Moldavian SSR, who "manage from the office; visit collective farms, state farms, and MTSs extremely rarely, and [therefore] know little about the state of affairs." Short on knowledge visible only with on-site observation, "they do not make specific proposals to develop agriculture on the basis of local capabilities." Only this sort of apathy, the report concludes, could explain a petition by officials in the republic's Tiraspol district, an area long known for cultivating corn, to *decrease* corn plantings by 100 hectares when other regions were increasing their commitments to the crop tenfold or more.[18] The message was simple: good leaders expanded plantings of corn. Bad ones remained in their office, mindlessly following bureaucratic procedures by issuing orders and demanding progress reports. The same document singled out the Karelian SSR, where one MTS had received 1,112 directives from the republic's agricultural office in 1954 and 105 more in January 1955 alone.[19] Amounting to more than three per calendar day, these orders diverted personnel to tabulating results and sending reports, none of which improved output.

---

[17] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d.157, l. 7.

[18] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 23, ll. 4–5.

[19] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 23, l. 5. In another example, the Vologda oblast agricultural department sent its subordinates 3,400 orders of various sorts in 1952, a number that grew to 4,500 in 1953. M. A. Beznin and T. M. Dimoni, Krest'ianstvo i vlast' v Rossii v kontse 1930-kh–1950-e gody," in *Mentalitet i agrarnoe razvitie Rossiii (XIX–XX vv.): Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii, 14–15 iiunia 1994 g.*, ed. V. P. Danilov and L. V. Milov (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1996), 159.

*　　*　　*

Khrushchev applied these critiques to the economic ministries in Moscow, in particular those responsible for manufacturing agricultural machines. In November 1954, he had called for output of tractors, planters, harvesters, and other implements suitable for row crops to rise. In discussions during the January 1955 Central Committee plenum, he upbraided S. A. Akopov, the minister of automobile, tractor, and agricultural machine building, for these failures.[20] The shortages clearly affected farm work, especially given the pressures resulting from the building corn crusade. Khrushchev's goal that each republic, oblast, and krai should grow millions of hectares of corn required machines to plant, cultivate, and harvest it and, moreover, the farms and MTSs had to use those on hand more efficiently. For instance, in the spring of 1955, officials in Stavropol krai ordered the MTSs to redistribute the corn planters available. If spread evenly among the krai's planned 280,000 hectares of corn, the burden on each of the 1,911 planters would amount to a substantial 147 hectares. In reality, the average for individual MTS fluctuated wildly between 36 hectares per planter and more than 1,000. Krai authorities ordered those MTSs with many planters to transfer some to those that had few, a common practice. Later inspections found, however, "that many MTSs did not fulfill the krai agricultural department's order, . . . while some transferred those in disrepair."[21]

In privately conferring with his agricultural advisors in March 1955, Khrushchev gave informal orders that produced specific government actions, demonstrating his authority over policy. His verbal instruction set in motion the Central Committee apparat, which formulated a policy to address long-running shortages of machines. "I would ask," he politely commanded, "that you do something about wheeled tractors, specialized implements [for growing corn], and

[20] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 124, l. 54.

[21] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6539, l. 6.

silage harvesters. Focus on that and consult with Comrade [I. I.] Kuz'min."[22] A lighter, more maneuverable tractor with wheels provided advantages in planting and cultivating row crops such as corn. Tractors in the USSR typically had caterpillar tracks, making them better suited to plowing and tasks requiring more horsepower. As the delegation to the US discovered later that year, American wheeled tractors were lighter and more powerful than Soviet equivalents, a finding that set in motion efforts to improve Soviet models.[23] Both decisions demonstrated that Khrushchev understood that his wager on corn could not succeed on the basis of manual labor alone. An official in the Central Committee department responsible for industry and transportation, Kuz'min served as a liaison to the ministries managing industrial production in those spheres.[24]

As a result, Soviet ministries diverted significant resources to carrying out Khrushchev's informal directive. Central Committee officials orchestrated policies for the Council of Ministers to approve, allocating funds and factories to manufacture the needed machines. In May 1955, the Council of Ministers ordered the silage harvesters necessary to alleviate a prospective burden on the farms and their workforce during the fall season, when other important crops also matured. Officials often expressed concern about overwhelming demands for labor during the harvest, a result of the burden bringing in corn put on farms. To combat the problem, the government instructed factories belonging to ten separate ministries to produce nearly 40,000 harvesters by fall. This involved the Ministries of Heavy Machine Building, Transportation Machine Building, Agricultural Machine Building, General Shipbuilding, and more; the jumble

---

[22] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 64, l. 33.

[23] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 8. The delegation's engineer, A. A. Ezhevskii, reported to Khrushchev that the USSR's common Belarus tractor weighed 3.25 metric tons and delivered thirty-seven horsepower. The American tractor he selected for comparison, made by International Harvester, delivered 49.5 horsepower and weighed just 2.83 tons.

[24] Shepilov derided Kuz'min as an undereducated sycophant, unschooled in the affairs Khrushchev tasked him to manage and unskilled in anything but flattering the leader. Shepilov, *Kremlin's Scholar*, 303. For more on how the Central Committee directed the formation of government policy, see: Hough, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, 444–45.

of bureaucracies hints at the sisyphean task of coordinating the investment of just over 300 million rubles.[25]

Emphasizing the importance of machines in verbal orders and in speeches, Khrushchev guaranteed that the government invested resources in them, but his measures nonetheless faced numerous obstacles. Ordered to produce the corn harvesters, the ministers initially protested that they lacked the necessary materials. Before passage of the Council of Ministers' directive in May, Minister of Construction N. A. Dygai and Minister of Ferrous Metallurgy A. G. Sheremetev objected that commitments to existing projects had already depleted reserves, preventing their ministries from filling the new orders.[26] By early August, investigators had proven those claims false. Most damagingly, they discovered that the ministers had claimed that they lacked the materials, but simultaneously ordered subordinates to find and allocate them.[27] The ministers had tried to shed new responsibilities that complicated existing production plans. Authorities interpreted these as attempts limit obligations and fulfill plans, favoring that parochial interest over the pressing need determined by party and state leaders. Sheremetev and Dygai consequently earned reprimands, while other ministers received only warnings for lesser infractions.[28]

Despite the supposed efficiency of their vertical integration, the ministries each failed to meet the directive's goals for delivering the harvesters on time. Inspectors discovered that the ministries had fallen far behind the schedule required to ensure delivery by harvest in late August and September. On August 10, 1955, Deputy Minister of Agriculture G. S. Sitnikov reported to the minister of government oversight, V. G. Zhavoronkov, that his ministry had not

---

[25] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 89, d. 111, l. 259. At the exchange rate of four Soviet rubles to a US dollar, this amounted to over $75 million in 1955 and, when adjusted for inflection, more than $650 million in 2012. The union-level government's budget for that year, by comparison, was 112 billion rubles.

[26] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 89, d. 111, ll. 148–49 and ll. 210–11.

[27] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 89, d. 111, ll. 288–89.

[28] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 89, d. 111, l. 299.

received the scheduled allotment of machines. The manufacturers' record was dismal: according to the original directive, they should have completed approximately 35,000 silage harvesters by the date of Sitnikov's report. In fact, the Ministry of Heavy Machine Building had achieved the most success by assembling 600 of the 10,000 ordered, or 6 percent of its quota. Sitnikov could only dryly note, "Such unsatisfactory production of these devices threatens to prevent delivery in time for the harvest."[29]

The frustration Khrushchev expressed with the ministries also sheds light on the relationship between the party leader's authority and the government's formal powers. The ministries' mismanagement of manufacturing explains his hostility toward S. G. Akopov at the January plenum. Hearing experts describe the more efficient practices they had observed in American factories, Khrushchev again expressed irritation at Soviet ministries' failings. When that ineffectiveness threatened his goals for the corn program and this policy, government organizations, including the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Government Oversight, identified and corrected breakdowns. An interim inspection report dated June 20, 1955, and distributed to Presidium members demonstrates the intertwining of party and government operations.[30] Even as Khrushchev asserted the party's primacy and its authority over the economy, the ministries were a crucial contributor to the success or failure of a policy.

The Council of Ministers carried out a similar program for building and delivering machines for the harvest in 1956 and made further efforts thereafter. Directives passed in March and June 1956, earmarked a budget of more than 2.3 billion rubles for these efforts.[31] The ministries responsible fell behind and delivered the machines later than the schedule demanded, although they did complete delivery by November 1956.[32] Inspections revealed concerns familiar

---

[29] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 773, l. 60.

[30] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 89, d. 111, l. 287.

[31] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 810, l.5. That total equaled $575 million in 1956, or $4.9 billion in 2012.

[32] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 810, l.188.

from 1955, further exacerbated by complaints about the acute lack of spare parts to repair existing machines, a recurring grievance.

Authorities frequently heard complaints that the machines factories delivered were poorly constructed. Among the letters the Ministry of Government Oversight received in 1956, a particularly vehement one blamed factory workers in the city of Barnaul. A group of combine drivers working for an MTS in the surrounding Altai krai wrote to the quality-control inspectorate to report major defects in the machines they received. Workers applied paint improperly and assembled the harvesters' various components so haphazardly that the valuable equipment fell apart during transport to the MTS. The results were clear by the time the combines reached their destination: "They are shipped barbarically," the letter continues, arriving covered in rust, having been stored in the open air, subject to the rain. "Why should we pay 30,000 rubles for a combine?" the letter asks. "And what's more – for this junk? . . . It would probably be better to just send us the raw materials."[33] This evidence is anecdotal, but the constant refrains in the Soviet press made the poor quality of factories' output well known. Historian Donald Filtzer comments on the "notorious" issue of defective production and damaged goods, as well as their considerable cumulative effect across the economy.[34]

Because supplies of agricultural machines remained insufficient to meet the needs of expanding cornfields over the coming years, local leaders often lobbied for larger allotments of the planters, cultivators, and harvesters farms needed. In early 1957, for example, officials in Russia's Kostroma oblast petitioned the RSFSR Council of Ministers for increased aid. Seeking resources permitting farms to adopt industrial farming practices, the oblast bosses hoped for a larger allotment of tractors and harvesters, as well as annual deliveries of 37,000 metric tons of synthetic fertilizers and 14,700 metric tons of seeds offering higher yields of wheat, oats, barley, and corn. Moscow authorities did not fulfill all these requests, indicating limits on their ability—

[33] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 810, l. 93.

[34] Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization*, 164.

or willingness—to support Khrushchev's objectives.[35]

Appeals from below suggest that shortages of machines remained common into the 1960s, despite Khrushchev's efforts to remedy the problem. In 1962, the leaders of Stavropol krai desperately requested a larger allowance of implements to aid farms in cultivating expanded corn plantings, the largest in the history of the corn crusade. Although they reckoned that they needed 2,000 more planters to address previous years' shortfalls, they most likely overestimated their requirements in hopes that the lower actual number they received might meet their needs. Having received no planters at all in 1960 and 1961, the krai authorities petitioned for an expanded allotment of 1,900, but Moscow had earmarked only 220, and those were scheduled to arrive until in the year's third quarter, after the planting season. Similarly, the krai's farms did not have enough cultivators, threatening corn plantings with being overcome by weeds. The leaders therefore requested that deliveries for the first half of 1962 expand from 650 to 1,000. Finally, they claimed a need for 1,500 trucks for transporting seeds during planting and grain during harvest, but had only 1,290 on hand. They requested 290, but received an allocation of only 80.[36] These pleas notwithstanding, Stavropol received only an supplemental allocation of 30 trucks, 540 planters, and Moscow's unhelpful assurance that they had no resources to provide more.[37]

* * *

Moscow pressured oblast, krai, and republic heads to implement policies, but frequently encountered unresponsiveness. Hidden beneath the appearance of inertia were local officials'

---

[35] GARF, f. A-259, op. 7, d. 7992, ll. 1–3.

[36] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 381, ll. 120-22. Shortages such as these negatively affected corn harvests in regions with the best conditions. A request the same year came from Dagestan ASSR to substitute wheat for grain corn in the procurement plan because of forecast lower yields. They blamed these on a shortage of tractors and other equipment, which caused farms to plant using unapproved methods or later than scheduled, which made the crop more susceptible to dry conditions that hit the republic that summer. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 381, l. 141.

[37] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 381, l. 124.

efforts to balance these responsibilities with calculations of risk and reward. The details of an expansive effort to produce double-cross hybrid corn for use in production illustrate this phenomenon. The hybrids offered up to 30 percent more output than other hybrids and varieties, and this caused authorities to undertake a crash program between 1955 and the end of the decade to acquire the new varieties, grow them, harvest the grain, store it, transport it, and construct factories for processing it into seed ready for the following year. Although the path to realizing the policy was not smooth, Soviet officials did so by 1960. The interconnected processes left a wider paper trail in the archives in comparison to the vast majority of plantings, which collective and state farms grew to use themselves for animal feed; that corn appeared only in statistical reports. By contrast, Khrushchev and his advisors considered these hybrids vital, so party and government officials participated directly in organizing production.

By pouring substantial resources into the program, leaders hoped to supply hybrid corn seed sufficient for all plantings by the end of the 1950s. Before 1955, farms had produced intervarietal hybrids, but after Khrushchev blessed the double-cross hybrids favored in the US that October, the drive to boost production enjoyed support from the highest levels. Entitled "On collective and state farms' transition to planting hybrid corn seed," the resulting plan established a target of 169,000 metric tons of seed in 1956 and 300,600 tons by 1960.[38] In 1956, the initial offensive involved over 600 state farms and 1,400 collectives across southern oblasts, krais, and republics. Officials had to coordinate time-sensitive and technical processes throughout the growing season, without which the grain would prove useless as seed. The first year, farms in Ukraine exceeded the plan of 120,000 metric tons by producing 141,300 tons. Defective planting, detasseling, harvesting, and storage, however, ensured that 34 percent were unsuitable as seed and, therefore, fewer than 100,000 tons was in fact the valuable hybrid seed.[39]

---

[38] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 90, d. 789, l. 174.

[39] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 90, d. 789, l. 145.

Central authorities first had to make sure that farms planted the seeds at all: bureaucracies require written orders to function smoothly, but circumstantial evidence indicates that Soviet officials commonly issued and executed informal verbal instructions. Those could land subordinates in the predicament of having received that authorization, but also having no proof to show inspectors. On April 27, 1956, the chairman of Stavropol krai's "Will of the Proletariat" collective farm wrote to district authorities requesting that his farm be freed from an obligation to plant 150 hectares of seed corn. He pleaded that this order, on top of existing plans to produce seed potatoes, overburdened the farm. The chairman received permission over the telephone from the krai agricultural administration to plant only 50 hectares of the genetic lines necessary to produce the prized VIR-42 double-cross hybrid.[40] He did not, however, receive "official clearance" in the form of a written confirmation.[41] When the collective's deputy chairman explained this unwritten order to the inspectors who visited, it failed to placate them.

From a distance, it seemed that the local officials had simply refused to implement the directive from above. In the first report on the issue, the farm managers offered an "explanation" for the deficiencies uncovered on the day of the inspection, pointing to this verbal order. The second report, the inspector's formal one to the Ministry of Government Oversight in Moscow, does not repeat that claim, or provide any rationale at all for the farm's decision to plant only 33 percent of its assignment of hybrid corn. To an official in Moscow reading the latter report, the farm's managers simply refused to carry out orders. Such informal authorizations, unsupported by written confirmation appear in the archival record rarely, unsurprising given the fleeting nature of a telephone conversation. Two outcomes were possible: verbal orders subsequently gained the backing of written ones or, if not, entered the record as an unexplained failure of a subordinate organization to follow its orders. The "Will of the

---

[40] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 816, l. 140. VIR-42 was at the time the most widespread and productive Soviet-produced double-cross hybrid, and was named for the All-Union Institute for Plant Breeding [*Vsesoiuznyi institut rastenievodstva*], where scientists developed it.

[41] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 816, l. 139.

Proletariat" collective's managers did not shirk orders from above; in fact, the farm received commendations and was considered one of the best in the krai, as the assignment to produce the seeds attests. The farm's leaders did not resist, but made a conscious choice to deemphasize corn in order to concentrate on the more familiar task of growing potatoes; in so doing, they failed only to follow bureaucratic rules.

Inspections of other regions revealed similar "shortcomings." In the Moldavian SSR, inspectors disclosed, "Many managers of collective farms and MTSs undervalue the importance of raising high-yielding hybrid corn seeds." The farm bosses planted far fewer hectares than ordered, but reported that they had planted the full amount. One of the republic's farms, the most extreme of six cases cited, reported that it had planted the full seventy-four hectares. The inspection report dryly noted, "However, the inspection revealed that this contradicted the actual situation . . . and in fact [the farm] planted a total of only four hectares," or 5 percent of the planned total.[42] Although leaders declared the program vital, local officials failed to carry out orders for a reason indiscernible through the archival record, and then lied to superiors in an attempt to maintain the appearance that they had complied.

Even when farms planted the prescribed number of hectares, good-faith efforts to produce hybrid seed might still fail. In the summer of 1956, inspectors sent to the "Donetsk" state farm in southern Russia's Kamensk oblast discovered major flaws in seed-corn plantings. The director and chief agronomist protested that they were not to blame. First, in May, the oblast agriculture department sent them a telegram giving instructions that reversed the names of the parental forms of the VIR-42 double-cross hybrid. The document reversed the names of the paternal form, *Svetoch* ["torch"], which pollinated the maternal form *Slava* ["glory"], the one requiring detasseling. To compound the problem, the farm then received seeds in a proportion—four times more of the maternal form—matching the faulty formula. On July 1, the state farm's managers estimated that the fields would yield approximately eighty metric tons of

[42] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 817, ll. 31–32.

seeds of a nonstandard variety without the desired characteristics.[43] Inspectors later reported that shortages of the necessary seeds made this problem, magnified by the oblast agriculture office's incorrect instructions, an oblast-wide phenomenon.[44]

Even though they commonly unearthed mistakes and coverups, Moscow's inspectors occasionally discovered positive results. The one responsible for Kamensk oblast, for instance, concluded that despite the "serious shortcomings" (another stock phrase) found on the "Donetsk" farm and other state farms, "the inspection showed that many MTSs and collective farms have endeavored to carry out party and government directives, and have organized work fairly well."[45] In comparison to the typical tone, this was a glowing review.

Having planted the corn required to produce the double-cross hybrids, farms faced a demanding task: detasseling. They had to organize scarce manual labor for timely work, and negotiate the dry conditions that threatened to damage the crop. The hybridization process required workers to cut off or pull out the pollen-producing tassel, the topmost part of the plant, from the plants in the rows containing the maternal line before those plants dispersed their pollen. This allowed those plants to be pollinated by the paternal line in the neighboring row, resulting in seeds that combined genetic material from each line. Reports from 1956 confirm that the state farms tasked with raising the double-cross hybrids had little manual labor available in July, but much was needed to complete this process on tens of millions of individual plants constituting thousands of hectares of corn. In Stavropol krai, a major producer, farms planted 7,325 hectares for this purpose. A worker could detassel two hectares during the two-week work period, amounting to a need for 3,670 workers.[46] The krai agricultural department requested in mid July that the heads of local secondary, postsecondary, and technical schools,

---

[43] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 817, l. 64.

[44] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 817, l. 87.

[45] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 817, l. 74.

[46] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 816, ll. 1–2.

then in summer recess, organize students to perform the job. The farms pledged to instruct the students how to do the job, as well as in the science and benefits of hybrid seeds. In return, students would earn room, board, and pay.[47] An end-of-the-year report concluded that the farms completed the process, but in some cases "hybridization plots had to be scrapped due to poor detasseling."[48] In Central Asia's Kyrgyz SSR, for instance, farmworkers removed the tassels from the wrong plants, did so incompletely, or planted the rows of the maternal lines too far from those of the paternal. As a result, approximately one third of plantings had no worth as seed.[49] In the Moldavian SSR, that figure was 1,759 of 16,346 hectares, or 9.3 percent.[50]

The harvest also proved a laborious and troubled effort. In 1956, many regions experienced a late spring *and* early frosts, making picking the corn on time even more vital. Labor shortages and poor organization caused a large percentage of farms to fail.[51] Beginning on September 27, 1956, inspectors in Krasnodar and Stavropol krais, as well as Belgorod, Kamensk, Voronezh, and Kursk oblasts took stock of the situation. They reported to the RSFSR Council of Ministers on October 5 that farms had harvested only 527 hectares, or 1.7 percent of the total area and 2.7 percent of the plan's target for that date.[52] As late as November 10, the situation remained "extremely unsatisfactory" because only 70 percent of the harvest was in.[53]

Many local considerations contributed to the general delay. As a case in point, farmworkers and managers had little incentive to work on picking the hybrid corn because so many pressing harvest-time tasks coincided with the effort. In Krasnodar krai, inspectors found

---

[47] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 816, ll. 20–21.

[48] GARF, f. A-259, op. 7, d. 6736, l. 78.

[49] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 828, ll. 13–14.

[50] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 828, l. 20.

[51] GARF, f. A-259, op. 7, d. 6736, ll. 78–80.

[52] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 828, l. 4.

[53] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 828, l. 41.

on one farm that ninety-four hectares of the prized VIR-42 hybrid was ready for harvest in the field, while the 700 collective farmers devoted their energies to regular production plots of corn, most likely because they received feed for personal livestock as pay for that work. Additionally, 20 percent of collective farmers did not turn out for work, choosing instead to tend their private plots. Even with enough farmworkers, the harvest might proceed in a "disorganized" manner. They unknowingly or uncaringly picked corn from the separate rows at the same time, mixing the valuable double-cross–hybrid seed from the plants of the maternal line with the normal grain from the paternal line.[54]

Once harvested, the corn might be stolen along the way from the fields to state stocks. Collective farmers in the Kyrgyz SSR harvested 100 metric tons of cobs in one field, but by the time the grain reached the collection point, it amounted to only 41.8 tons. As a report laconically noted, "the lack of necessary protection [means that] the corn in the field is fed to livestock, carried off, or spoiled."[55] Other republics faced similar problems in organizing the harvest and preventing theft. Even the part of the crop that made it in government procurement points did so very slowly: in late November 1956, Minister of Agriculture V. V. Matskevich declared that only 19.3 percent of the 178,000 metric tons of seed harvested had arrived, "an exceptionally disturbing state of affairs."[56] The corn continued to stream in, but the longer that took the further its quality would decline and the less would arrive. On farms, thieves had more opportunities to steal it, while managers might divert it to other uses. While there, it spoiled faster because of higher moisture content, which had to be removed by drying it in specialized ovens or carefully hung in a humidity- and temperature-controlled storeroom.

Local officials declared success in growing hybrid corn, even when it eluded them; consistent obfuscation made higher authorities skeptical of inflated claims. A summary on the

---

[54] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 828, l. 5.

[55] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 828, l. 15.

[56] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 828, l. 42.

whole USSR addressed to the minister of government oversight illustrates this distrust. "Soviet, party, and agricultural organizations," the document notes, "have carried out major [*sic*] efforts to ensure completion hybrid-corn–seed production. At the same time, the inspection demonstrated that substantial shortcomings exist." The document reproduced a common formula, claiming "major" efforts and, in contrast, admitting only relatively minor "shortcomings." The underlining of "major," was done in pencil, in the same hand as a comment in the margin reading "Really?" ["*Imenno?*"]. Thus whoever read the report, perhaps Minister Zhavoronkov, to whom it was addressed, expressed disbelief in that claim.[57]

Once the seeds had been harvested, obstacles yet remained, as the government had to store, transport, and distribute them. In 1956, inspectors visiting collection points under the USSR Ministry of Grain Procurement and its subsidiaries revealed still more "serious shortcomings."[58] Managers of the facilities had to construct new structures and maintain old ones, all needed to dry, store, and distribute the seeds. Inspectors found that these jobs remained incomplete and far behind schedule, although they lagged for comprehensible reasons, especially shortages of construction materials. Far less understandably, the on-site bosses had frequently reported tasks complete when they were not; often, work had not even begun on the jobs. In July 1956, scrutiny of the Nevinnomysk grain-collection facility in Stavropol krai discovered irregularities in repairs and preparations, to have been completed by July 1. The bosses had submitted routine paperwork declaring the jobs finished and given quality-control grades of "good" and even "excellent." Yet inspectors from outside the krai found a different situation altogether. "In fact," they concluded, "on July 13, 1956, . . . work was not complete on certain bins [for storing grain], as had been reported in the fraudulent documents." Those indicated that 625 meters of border fence had been repaired; in fact, no one had begun to do so. On May 23, the facility's managers reported a gate in the fence installed; in July,

[57] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 817, l. 7.

[58] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 817, l. 23.

inspectors found that this was not true.[59] The head of the organization under scrutiny had to justify him/herself as part of the inspection process. In this case, the director could only plead a lack of building materials, specialized drying and ventilation equipment, labor, and other resources.[60] This explained why the work was incomplete, but not why documents had fraudulently declared it complete. A similar state of affairs existed at the Bogoslov, Urakov, and Eren-Shakhar procurement points in Stavropol krai.[61] Found on four of the six sites inspected in the krai, these were common incidents; moreover, a summary for the whole USSR noted similar instances in other oblasts and republics.[62]

More than simply not completing projects on time and within the budget, these organizations lied to superiors. They declared complete some tasks they had not even *begun*. They probably did so to create the appearance that they had fulfilled the plan. The potential punishment for submitting false documents was less than the reprimand for admitting failure to fulfill production plans, repair schedules, and so on. Failing to meet plans seemed certain to result in extra scrutiny, unearned bonuses, censure, and—if frequent—firing. On the other hand, superiors might not notice fraudulent reporting, leaving it unpunished. These officials acted in ways that reflect a rational weighing of this risk of punishment against certain reproof for leaving plans unfulfilled.

Even when procurement agencies acquired, dried, and stored the seeds, they still had to face the logistical challenge of distributing them. Khrushchev demanded that farms across the USSR's regions, oblasts, and krais plant corn, but most could not produce seeds locally because of climatic constraints. As a result, authorities ordered farms in a narrow band stretching from the Moldavian SSR through parts of southern Ukraine, the North Caucasus, and irrigated lands

---

[59] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 816, ll. 42–43.

[60] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 816, ll. 47–48.

[61] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 816, ll. 53–57; 61–63; and 77–79, respectively.

[62] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 817, l. 23.

in Central Asia to produce the seeds. They had to supply all others, giving rise to a gargantuan task of transporting the seeds each winter. Telegrams conveyed the desire of oblast committees receiving the seeds to guarantee that shipments reached their destination, for example between the party committee of Chita oblast in Russia's Far East and the Ukrainian Central Committee. Even though the schedule called for transport in March and April, already in February the oblast secretary sent an insistent telegram to Kyiv in hopes of expediting shipment.[63] Many other regions, such as Altai krai, did likewise.[64] Once the seeds arrived, the receiving farms might neglect them. A series of inspections in Moscow oblast, for example, revealed that many farms had stored their allotments from state procurement agencies improperly, allowing the seeds to spoil. Questioned before the oblast soviet, the district officials responsible hoped to blame the producers and shippers, claiming that the seeds had already rotted by the time the district had received them.[65] Despite their entreaty, the officials received a "strong reprimand" for failing "to demonstrate necessary care for storing corn seeds prior to planting."[66]

The ministerial bureaucracies and the farms themselves thus used formal and informal practices to run the economy. Such practices helped the bureaucracies operate by breaking through barriers, but also introduced their own inefficiencies. Corn expected to become hybrid seed received heightened scrutiny from inspectors because it was destined for state procurement and because it offered a radical increase in yields. That attention made the hybrid-seed plantings unrepresentative of the whole, but it calls into question reports appearing in newspapers and traveling up the party hierarchy that claimed results too good to be true. Probing beneath the surface of local authorities' claims to have made "major efforts," admitting only minor "shortcomings," these inspections revealed failures and introduced solutions to the problems.

---

[63] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 404, ll. 148–51.

[64] For Altai krai, see: TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 404, ll. 172–74. Similar requests to the party's RSFSR agricultural department can be found in: RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, dd. 67–69.

[65] TsGAMO, f. 2157, op. 1, d. 4579, l. 152.

[66] TsGAMO, f. 2157, op. 1, d. 4579, l. 137.

Accentuating failures, the inspectors documented how the system functioned—or malfunctioned—thereby revealing otherwise indiscernible informal practices.

* * *

Once produced and procured, the double-cross hybrids traveled to specialized calibration factories. The USSR imported the first three of these factories under a contract with Roswell Garst, which grew from the contacts the Soviet delegation had established in 1955. Leaders hoped to speed production of new hybrids by buying the parental lines as well as the technology needed to sort seeds by size and shape in a process they called "calibration," preparing them for more efficient and productive planting. They planned to install the machines in time for the harvest of 1956. These projects enjoyed the support of authorities in Moscow, who frequently sent investigators with wide powers to identify delays, to speed progress, and to single out officials responsible for the frequent "shortcomings." Efforts to complete these three factories, as well as the larger number that the USSR constructed in subsequent years using Soviet copies of the equipment, demonstrate labor and materials shortages characteristic of the economy.

Authorities sited two factories in Ukraine, one at Novomoskovs'k in Dnipropetrovs'k oblast and another at Buialik in Odessa oblast, with output of 2,500 and 5,000 metric tons of seed per season, respectively. They constructed a third at Ust'-Labinsk in Krasnodar krai, which consisted of a cluster of factories with a combined capacity of 12,500 tons. Beginning in early 1956, work proceeded with the goal of full operation by the end of December, in time to process seed grown in 1956 for planting in 1957.[67] Specifics about how workers built walls, roofs, roads, and other facilities are not relevant to this analysis, but the procedure party officials used to apply pressure to managers and workers, thereby speeding the process, demonstrates their

[67] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, l. 1. The Ukraine Ministry of Government Oversight reported similarly to the USSR ministry: GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 817, ll. 28–30. Information on the plant in Krasnodar krai can be found in: GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 817, l. 163.

desire to encourage efforts to bring the plants on line as quickly as possible.

Early reports signaled that delays threatened almost from the start. On August 17, 1956, the director of the building trust—equivalent to a general contractor—responsible for the two sites in Ukraine alerted party authorities in Kyiv and Moscow to the slow tempo of progress. Contravening standard procedures, which called for officials to minimize failures when reporting to superiors, the director bluntly declared: "Conditions on the construction site threaten to disrupt the timetable established by the USSR Ministry of Grain Procurements in order No. 315 of May 31." Defending himself, he blamed a lack of qualified workers for delays.[68] On September 13, the Ukrainian Central Committee in Kyiv ordered republic, oblast, and district committees to designate someone to take "personal responsibility" for progress on each site. The republic party authorities dispatched officials from Kyiv to Dnipropetrovs'k and Odessa, and assigned another in Kyiv to verify progress at regular intervals. Each party committee received orders requiring "strict oversight by ministries and departments over all aspects of construction" as well as reports to superiors every five days.[69] They thus underscored the significance of the project.

Acting on these orders, authorities in Kyiv assigned the officials and secured skilled workers needed for each site. They found that frequent delays occurred because construction materials arrived irregularly or behind schedule. The sorting machines had reached the USSR by August, but neither they nor required technical drawings were yet on hand. Arriving from the US, the machines were first transported to Moscow, where engineers studied them in order to reverse engineer Soviet copies. Only afterward did they ship the equipment to the construction sites.[70] This circumstance left on-site officials facing a tight schedule. As a measure of progress, in early September, the Novomoskovs'k construction firm had spent only 1.3 million rubles, or

[68] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, l. 7.

[69] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, ll. 26–27.

[70] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 337.

26 percent of its 5-million-ruble budget. Similarly, the Buialik trust had spent only 19 percent of its 4-million-ruble budget.[71] During September, officials helped by dispatching required workers and organizing a second shift.[72]

By early October, the periodic reports to Kyiv described an improved situation, but ongoing challenges. On October 13, 1956, Odessa oblast authorities explained that they had commandeered students, collective farmers, and others to organize a second shift. This is reminiscent of the practice of "storming," typical of Soviet industry: supplies arrived at factories irregularly, forcing directors to spend time accumulating raw materials needed to produce the planned output for a given month, quarter, or year. Workers long had little to do, but then at the end of the period, they would throw themselves into high gear, working overtime and making heroic efforts to meet production quotas just in time.[73] The progress report on the calibration plant's construction, furthermore, entreated higher authorities to devote additional building materials to the project. Electrical equipment and structural metal, for instance, were difficult for the oblast party committee or the construction trust to acquire, so they asked officials in Kyiv to use their influence to do so.[74] In late October, reports to Moscow confirmed that delays continued.[75] Even the media joined the fray: the republic's newspapers, both Russian-language *Pravda Ukrainy* and Ukrainian-language *Radian'ska Ukraina*, publicized the slow progress.[76] Acting as an outlet for complaint, the newspapers forced the USSR Ministry of Grain Procurements and oblast party committees, as well as their local counterparts, to redouble attentiveness to the lagging projects. During Roswell Garst's second visit to the USSR, in

---

[71] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, l. 4. The sum of 5 million rubles amounted to $1.25 million in 1956 dollars at the official exchange rate, or $10.6 million in 2013.

[72] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, l. 10.

[73] For more, see; Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization*, 19.

[74] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, ll. 32–35.

[75] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 828, ll. 30–31.

[76] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, ll. 38–39.

October 1956, officials from each of the three construction trusts gathered at the site in Krasnodar krai to consult with the American corn impresario.[77] Given the previous delays, the production lines unsurprisingly remained incomplete on the November 1 deadline. New orders established December 30 as the target.[78] In December, the goal became January 25, 1957.[79]

As these efforts show, officials in Moscow and Kyiv assigned great importance to the project, a conclusion reinforced by Khrushchev's personal attention. The Ukrainian party authorities routinely compiled reports on the two construction sites that reached Khrushchev. As a result, he pressured Ukrainian leaders, including his protégé A. I. Kirichenko, first secretary of the republic's party, to speed things along. An appraisal by the Ukrainian Central Committee Agricultural Department, dated December 21, 1956, made its way from Kyiv to Moscow, and from Moscow into the Ukrainian party's files in Kyiv, having acquired along the way a personal note Khrushchev wrote to Kirichenko in the margin, dated December 22.[80] The First Secretary demanded that Kirichenko "read and consider" the situation with the construction sites, an order that required a real response. A note in the same file indicates that Kirichenko read the report, but not any commands he gave in response. For its part, the report painted a picture of failure: "Unsatisfactory management of construction by the Ministry of Grain Procurements, local party committees, and government organizations has disrupted the timetable for beginning production." In the end, the factories went into operation late, in piecemeal fashion, and without the secondary structures needed to keep them running, such as housing for workers.[81]

A 1958 analysis of the economic costs and benefits of the factories shed light on their mixed results, and on subsequent adaptations of the technology. The largest plant, at Ust'-

---

[77] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, ll. 28–29.

[78] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, ll. 41 and 43.

[79] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, ll. 45–46.

[80] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, l. 57.

[81] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 31, d. 411, l. 24.

Labinsk in Krasnodar krai, proved too costly to operate and unable to take in enough suitable raw material from the surrounding farms to run at full capacity. Officials therefore ordered no more of that size. More usefully, they could construct factories with a 5,000-ton–per-season capacity for 2,770 rubles per ton. The smallest size, with a 2,500-ton capacity, came in at 4,099 rubles per ton. Both plants, like the largest, struggled to procure sufficient quantities of raw seeds from nearby farms.[82] Sites near railroad junctions, existing procurement facilities, and asphalt roads connecting adjoining farms were rare. The analysis therefore recommended building small-capacity plants, even though both construction and operation per unit of output cost more.[83] It furthermore suggested more rigorously managing production, selecting the best sites, and overseeing the many steps needed to produce the seeds.[84]

Once the first three calibration factories went into production in early 1957, leaders embarked on an expansive program to construct more using domestic adaptations of the American equipment. The USSR Council of Ministers adopted a directive on December 4, 1956, designating sites in Ukraine, the Moldavian SSR, and the RSFSR's southern regions. In the RSFSR, the six plants were sited in Rostov oblast, Krasnodar krai, North Ossetia ASSR, and in Stavropol krai, the focus of this section. In 1958, the program continued with nineteen large-capacity and six smaller-capacity factories.[85] Even after improvements trimmed their cost, each carried a price tag of several million rubles, making this a substantial capital investment.

In March 1958, RSFSR inspectors discovered serious delays in building the first two factories in Stavropol krai, at the settlements of Rasshevatka and Bogoslovsk. At Bogoslovsk, the first of two 2,500-ton–capacity production lines went into use at the end of 1957, but it operated inefficiently because of poor construction. Workers had installed equipment behind schedule on

[82] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 336.

[83] GARF f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 339.

[84] GARF f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 343.

[85] GARF f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 337.

the first production line, a problem evident in building the second, due in time for the 1958 harvest.[86] The construction trust in charge of the site lacked machines to move earth and raise structures, forcing managers to substitute large quantities of workers. The inspectors furthermore judged that poor leadership and inadequate political agitation had allowed workforce turnover to skyrocket: 54 percent of workers left in the first quarter of 1958 alone. Inspectors found similar conditions at Rasshevatka, located in Novo-Aleksandrovsk district.[87] At the end of May, a summary of inspections conducted at sites across the RSFSR confirmed that these were common problems. Much like the plants in Ukraine in 1956, many sites lacked basic building materials, such as bricks and timber.[88] The situation in Stavropol had progressed little, so inspectors pressured the krai soviet to pass a resolution demanding improvement on "unsatisfactory progress."[89] Summaries incorporated findings of many individual inspectors, whose reports offer more detail: the inspector's specific documentation on Rasshevatka and Bogoslovsk complained of slow and poor quality work in all areas, underscoring not only the 54 percent turnover rate, but also that the 125 workers on hand should have been sufficient to fulfill work quotas. "Nonetheless," he noted, "because of poor labor organization and bad work, the construction plan was unfulfilled." He further observed that the site's head had been fired "for poorly organizing construction, unsatisfactory management, low-quality results, and resulting cost overruns," but as of May 9, 1958, no replacement had been named.[90]

By August 1958, little had improved in getting construction back on schedule. I. I. Samokhval, head of the krai grain-procurement office and the official nominally responsible, reported to krai party-committee secretary I. K. Lebedev. Typical of documents of the sort, it

---

[86] GARF, f. A-340, op. 2, d. 108, l. 23.

[87] GARF, f. A-340, op. 2, d. 108, l. 27.

[88] GARF, f. A-340, op. 2, d. 108, ll. 32–36.

[89] GARF, f. A-340, op. 2, d. 108, ll. 58–60.

[90] GASK, f. 2481, op. 1, d. 399, ll. 129–34.

consists of two pages that dryly listed budget and technical details, and two more that shift responsibility from Samokhval to others. Spreading blame widely, he categorically denied that he or his organization deserved any of it. Tasks requiring substantial amounts of labor, such as installing equipment and completing buildings, were carried out "extremely unsatisfactorily" because the local construction trust had organized work inefficiently and permitted the labor shortage to persist. Equipment and other needed components arrived late from manufacturers located outside the krai. "Such a low tempo in completing and installing," Samokhval concluded, "threatens completion of the plant's full capacity in the designated timeframe."[91]

An inspector from the RSFSR's Committee for Government Oversight, successor to the ministry, corroborated parts of Samokhval's evaluation. Further details emerged not only about delayed material deliveries and the insufficient workforce, but also about shoddy on-site management. The construction trust had appointed a foreman who later proved to be "a person without education, a con-man who mostly took bribes and lowered output norms."[92] Suppressing the quota of labor required in a day, week, or month was a frequent ploy to pad the pockets of workers and managers by making the plan easier to fulfill and overfulfill. That provided opportunities to earn bonuses without extraordinary effort, making workers happier and creating the appearance of effective leadership.

The inspector suggested remedies for the site's problems that illuminate the effects of Khrushchev's maligned administrative reforms, the *sovnarkhozy* or Councils of the National Economy [*Sovet narodnogo khoziaistva*]. First, he recommended the krai party committee pass a resolution admonishing the construction trust. Second, he proposed that they pressure the local *sovnarkhoz*, an administrative entity designed to coordinate production within its domain and with other *sovnarkhozy*, to more ensure manufacturers produced and delivered the needed

[91] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7568, ll. 15–16.

[92] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7568, l. 21.

equipment quickly.[93] Instituted in early 1957, the councils controlled heavy and consumer goods industries, but left industries related to defense under centralized ministries in Moscow. It was a step in Khrushchev's attempt to raise efficiency by reining in the ministries, but in effect replaced their overcentralized and parochial bureaucracies with new problems. The system forced regional councils to coordinate and cooperate among themselves, which they had few incentives to do. Scholars have concluded that the reform increased the localism that placed narrow interests ahead of efficiency in pursuing national priorities, complicating coordination of economic initiatives.[94]

The same inspector's evaluation of the Bogoslovsk site found similar conditions, but a particularly severe labor shortage. In seven months of 1958, 175 workers had left, replaced by only 103 new hires. The problem was so pressing that the construction trust contracted with a nearby corrective-labor colony for manual laborers, including skilled construction workers. The colony sent an average of only fifteen workers, even though the agreement specified fifty. The need for such measures, however, demonstrates how acute the labor shortage had become and how constant the demand for continued progress.[95] If authorities could not prevent mass turnover in a labor force free to move about, then prison labor had to substitute.

The concerns of Samokhval and of the inspectors proved well founded. On December 30, 1958, long after the production lines were scheduled to be working, the krai party committee passed a resolution condemning delays in bringing major components of the plants into

---

[93] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7568, l. 22.

[94] See: Thompson, "Industrial Management," in *Khrushchev*, ed. Khrushchev, Taubman, and Gleason, 145–46; and Nataliya Kibita, "Moscow–Kiev Relations and the *Sovnarkhoz* Reform," in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953–1964*, ed. Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilič. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 73 (New York: Routledge, 2011), 94–111.

[95] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7923, ll. 26-27. Corroboration for this situation can be found in: GARF f. R-9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 10. Labor-force turnover had been a substantial problem since post-Stalin reforms reduced the severity of labor codes that had included draconian penalties for unauthorized quitting under wartime and postwar statues. For more on the phenomenon in the Khrushchev era, see: Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization*, 42–47.

operation. In late February 1959, inspectors found that the calibration line had finally put out its first production, but workers had not yet completed critical jobs such as fine-tuning the machines.[96] Having failed to clear storage areas, managers left unprocessed seed to lie in the open air. Stocks of the chemical fungicides were on hand, but the factories had not yet begun treating seeds.[97] Local party committees also had failed to carry out orders, including "to implement the directive of the CPSU krai committee bureau to improve production," for example by implementing measures to conserve fuel and electricity. Furthermore, they had failed in "cultural-educational work," which included encouraging workers to emulate the best workers and to participate in a new campaign to create "communist labor brigades."[98]

These problems were not specific to Stavropol krai; inspectors found them at similar construction sites in Ukraine. Beginning in April 1958, the USSR Committee for Government Oversight carried out a series of inspections revealing failures and delays throughout the republic. The site at the town of Lozova in Khar'kiv oblast stood out as the most troubled. In several documents, inspectors and party officials alike judged the work of the oblast construction trust and its on-site managers "unsatisfactory." The first managers had "wastefully" used resources, resulting in a recommendation "to hold them responsible" (*privlech' k otvetstvennosti*), meaning reprimand, firing, or penalties as party members.[99] In this case, they were fired for their "irresponsible approach" to the job in February 1958.[100] In April, inspectors still found progress wanting, as poor management led to a disorganized labor force and so many mistakes in construction that inspectors labeled the supposedly complete factory "*brak*," or defective production. Many individual elements they deemed flawed due to "unskilled"

---

[96] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7923, l. 3.

[97] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7923, ll. 5–6.

[98] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7923, l. 7.

[99] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 268.

[100] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 259–60.

["*negramotnyi*," lit. "illiterate"] work.[101] Those responsible denied the existence of such flaws or blamed them on the poor supplies and low quality of building materials.[102] Holding a meeting of the construction site's personnel, a visiting inspector ordered workers to fix the defects, and afterward recommended formal reprimands for the officials in charge.[103] Even after this second intervention, the oblast party committee found in June 1958 that the chaotic state of affairs continued. Despite efforts, "the plants' construction continues to lag behind, and is unsatisfactory" because the proper machinery and materials were not on hand. Word of continued delays caused the Ukraine Ministry of Grain Products to hold high-level meetings to discuss solutions; officials sent orders to solve the shortages, delays, and shoddy work at Lozova, but also at similar sites in Odessa, Khmel'nytskiy, Chernivtsi, and other oblasts.[104]

Word of these failures, which reached even the Central Committee, did not ensure that on-site officials got results. A summary, dated June 9, 1958, went to the USSR Council of Ministers and to A. I. Kirichenko, the Central Committee secretary then responsible for agriculture who had until a short time before been head of the Ukrainian party.[105] Summarizing the failures outlined above, the report distributes blame widely:

> Inspectors determined that the RSFSR Ministry of Grain Procurements and Ukrainian SSR Ministry of Grain Procurements, their oblast administrations, the bureaus of oblast party committees, and bureaus of oblast soviets where the plants are being constructed have not organized timely and full-scale building this year. The [republics'] Councils of Ministers have not established necessary oversight. As a result, construction and installation plans for the first quarter, and for April, have not been fulfilled; [progress] on construction of the plants is therefore unsatisfactory.[106]

---

[101] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 252.

[102] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 270–71.

[103] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 258.

[104] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 279, handwritten note on reverse of l. 280. More on the failures at Lozova and other sites can be found in: GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 344–50.

[105] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 354–61.

[106] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, l. 363.

Central Committee secretary F. R. Kozlov, moreover, sent copies of the report to the heads of the respective Councils of Ministers, as well as to the USSR ministers of agriculture and of grain procurements.[107] His demand that they correct these faults demonstrated the consideration high authorities gave to the matter, but even this vigilance did not succeed in smoothly completing the factories.

* * *

Even after the calibration plants began to ready seed corn for planting, operation proved disorderly. In early 1959, inspections in Stavropol krai revealed that managers often violated standard procedures. First, large quantities of grain designated for processing and use as seed lay in the open air at collection points, merely covered with tarpaulins offering insufficient protection against rain, snow, wind, and sun, rather than housed in well-ventilated buildings.[108] Second, workers did not keep up with the schedule. As of January 15, 1959, they were still cleaning and drying seeds, the process's first stages, which should have been completed by that date. I. I. Samokhval again explained delays by citing mitigating circumstances, none of which hid the fact that the plan's targets remained unmet. Reporting to the krai party committee, he acknowledged that progress had been "unsatisfactory."[109] Inspectors later found that, of the annual quota of 16,000 metric tons for farms in the krai and 64,000 tons for shipping outside it, only 3,766 tons were sorted and only 2,000 tons ready for distribution on March 1, 1959, as spring planting loomed. The plan required that 42,000 tons should have shipped by that date. Samokhval received the bulk of the blame for this failure. The krai party committee concluded that, despite orders to "achieve the rhythmic functioning of all sections and machines, the Grain

[107] GARF, f. R- 9477, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 362–70.

[108] Such problems continued in future years: in 1961 and 1962, similar inspections and directives concerned the storage of corn at the Rasshevatka, Bogoslovsk, and other procurement facilities. See: GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8863, l. 5.

[109] GASK, f. 2481, op. 1, d. 423, ll. 1–3.

Procurements Administration, Comrade Samokhval, and the plant directors are unsatisfactorily fulfilling them." Parts of the production line remained incomplete because machinery had been improperly installed and, furthermore, managers failed to organize production efficiently. Even demands that Samokhval attend meetings of the party committee's bureau on February 27 and March 3, 1959, and account for his actions achieved little effect. The party committee later indicated exasperation with the calibration plants' operation, and with Samokhval; however, officials recommended not a reprimand, but only that the negligent manager visit the bureau for the third time.[110]

Although the day-to-day operation of the plants had improved somewhat by later in 1959, a corruption scandal ensured the downfall of several officials, including Samokhval. Inspections in September 1959 found that the Bogoslovsk procurement facility and neighboring calibration plant regularly fulfilled its quotas.[111] They also revealed irregularities in the use of the grain corn that was the plant's raw material, and the resulting calibrated seeds. The krai procurement office and its head, Samokhval, had declared lots totaling 178 metric tons unsuitable for seed, and had reclassified them for use as feed. Samokhval claimed that the fault lay with the calibration machine, which intermixed low-quality, irregularly shaped kernels with the useful seed, rendering the output substandard.[112] This incident proved the culmination of a long chain of irregularities, which apparently led superiors to fire Samokhval. A summary of the "abuses of position" by procurement-department workers up to and including Samovkhval documents the case, as well as other instances in prior years. Between 1957 and 1959, he and his deputy had sold grain to a collective farm in Leningrad oblast, and, in return, bought timber allegedly for use in constructing the seed-corn calibration plants. In fact, the lumber proved to

[110] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7482, ll. 74–75.

[111] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7916, l. 72.

[112] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7916, l. 70.

be of very low quality.[113] Samokhval and his subordinates presumably profited from the exchange, perhaps by embezzling the difference between the grain's sale price and the low purchase price of the low-quality timber. In each case, Samokhval "attempted to shirk responsibility," but his actions in 1959 proved a breaking point. He gave orders diverting 697 metric tons out of a lot containing 1,071 tons of corn from seed processing to industrial refining into oil, starch, or spirit. The state had paid farms nearly 600,000 rubles as bonuses for producing the raw material for hybrid seed. When Samokhval diverted the corn to other uses, that expenditure went to waste. He insisted that the corn had not been up to the standard for seeds, but produced documentation to that effect for only 236 tons. Other officials attested that, when they shipped the lots of grain from the collection points to the plant, they had been between 86 and 88 percent satisfactory. The inspectors' report details two similar incidents, labeling the three of them "*proizvol*," a common term used to characterize bureaucrats' arbitrary moves in pursuit of expediency or personal profit.[114] These "illegal actions" incriminated Samokhval. I found no specific documents in the Stavropol archives confirming that he had been fired from his administrative position, but his name does not appear in any related files from subsequent years.[115]

In spite of hindrances, delays, poor quality, and spoilage, Soviet efforts to introduce the most advanced hybrids achieved some successes in subsequent years. In 1961, plans called for farms to produce 1 million metric tons of a range of hybrids suited to the USSR's various climate zones.[116] The program involved fifty research institutes, and more than 2,000 state and

---

[113] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7917, l. 102.

[114] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7917, l. 103.

[115] In fact, these were not the only instances in which Samokhval had to answer for poor job performance. His name appears in reports to the USSR Ministry of Government Oversight in 1953. GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 532, ll. 28–32.

[116] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 95, d. 800, l. 1.

collective farms.[117] The Committee for Procurements reported an actual output of 1.25 million tons of such seeds, with the result that the state paid out bonuses of 188 million rubles to farms for the hybrids most in demand.[118] Even this effort, however, proved insufficient to meeting collective farms' requests for hybrid seeds to plant an expanded area—more than 37 million hectares—planted in 1962.[119]

* * *

Illustrating common practices, one multiregion inspection sheds light on how the corn crusade proceeded in individual districts and on individual farms. On August 20, 1958, the RSFSR Committee for Government Oversight began a campaign to survey corngrowing in Krasnoiarsk krai in eastern Siberia, as well as in Briansk, Orel, and Penza oblasts of central European Russia. Inspectors fanned out from Moscow, teaming with local counterparts to scrutinize how farms organized labor, propagandized proper methods, harvested the crop—termed "the struggle with waste during the harvest" in the documents—and accounted for the resulting feed. The results for Krasnoiarsk krai, a vast region of mostly cool climate in the basin of the Enisei River, brought a number of surprising details to the attention of authorities in Moscow. First, the inspectors showed that the cropland devoted to corn had declined steadily from a peak of more than 250,000 hectares in 1956, to only 195,000 in 1958.[120] Khrushchev reversed this trend by renewing the crusade at the December 1958 Central Committee plenum.

Second, the inspectors collated their findings into a document that, although differing from the boilerplate reports local committees made to superiors, resembled them. It began by

---

[117] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 96, d. 871, l. 2.

[118] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 96, d. 871, ll. 34–37. At the new exchange rate of .9 rubles to the dollar according to the official exchange rate that took effect on January 1, 1961, in concert with a currency reform, this figure amounts to $169 million, or $1.3 billion in 2013.

[119] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 96, d. 871, l. 2.

[120] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, ll. 1–5.

identifying farms that had proven that satisfactory results were possible, but continued to list the failures of the great majority. Attributing the krai's rising meat and dairy output to "vanguard" farms and their harvests of corn for feed, the officials concluded that this "demonstrated that, even given the conditions of the krai, observing the correct methods for cultivating corn could ensure a high yield of green plant mass." They detailed the activities of the Stalin collective farm of Minusinsk district, which did everything by the book and achieved the best yields in the region. At thirty metric tons per hectare, however, these were just barely above those considered economical. They documented the problems and prohibited practices causing many farms to grow only low yields of corn. Far more common, these farms harvested yields as low as 10 percent of those achieved by the Stalin collective farm. In 1956, the average yield for the krai had been 4.1 tons per hectare; even in rising to 5.4 tons in 1957, yields remained approximately 20 percent of the target.[121] In 1958, worse still, the harvest fell to a mere 3.3 tons per hectare. This figure, however, was suspect: the inspectors found many instances when farm personnel calculated yields inaccurately, measuring the harvest by volume rather than weight, or even by simply estimating it.[122] Additionally, the farms harvested their corn too early, at the end of July and in early August when the corn was still maturing, because they faced demands to also harvest wheat, barley, and other staple grains, which tied up machines and workers in late August. Consequently, the nutrient content of livestock feed made from corn was low, a fact contributing to lower weight gain and milk output of the farms' livestock. Farms planted corn on poor land, applied no fertilizer, and did little if any work to remove weeds. Each of these widespread practices meant that the corn that did grow drew on fewer soil nutrients, competed with more weeds, and yielded far less than it—or traditional feed crops—might have. As they so often did, the inspectors blamed these failures on local officials, concluding, "Numerous facts demonstrate that, as in past years, in many collective and state farms they still do not devote the

[121] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, ll. 6–7

[122] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, l. 14.

necessary attention to this valuable feed crop." Local officials defended themselves by citing shortages of tractors and implements. The inspectors found eighty-four suitable tractors, a total they deemed sufficient for the district. They also found that state farms in particular had adequate machinery, but those farms failed to remove weeds on the more than 900 hectares of corn.[123] The inspectors instead blamed party and agricultural officials for "clearly insufficient efforts" to organize and educate workers.[124]

Locales such as Minusinsk district were located on the southern edge of Krasnoiarsk krai, where the climate was comparatively mild, but some of the krai's farms were too far to the north to grow corn. Contemporary critics and subsequent scholars have overstated the importance of the northerly climate, which had a hand in corn's failure only in some locales, and these accounted for only a small percentage of the total cropland, and of cropland devoted to corn. The most northerly districts in Krasnoiarsk krai that planted corn did bring in predictably dismal harvests: in 1958, frosts came as late as June 5 and as early as August 16, leaving only 32 days between with sufficient warmth to sustain corn's growth, far short of the approximately 100 needed. Inspectors found that these farms planted only a few hectares of corn,[125] a total that amounted to a tiny percentage in comparison to the hundreds of hectares planted on farms in the krai's southern districts and the hundreds of thousands planted across Krasnodar krai, Stavropol krai, Ukraine, and the Moldavian SSR.

Efforts to grow corn in the far north *were* doomed to fail, but the average yields for the entire USSR were low because southern farms harvested low yields, not because of the failure of a few hectares in areas truly too far to the north. Economic analyst Naum Jasny documented that in 1959 farms grew corn on 22.4 million hectares, or 11 percent of the total cropland of 196.3 million hectares. More than half of that total was planted in climatic regions even the

---

[123] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, ll. 8–10

[124] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, l. 13.

[125] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, ll. 10–11.

skeptical Jasny considered suitable for corn. Some 5.7 million hectares were in northern regions, such as these districts of Krasnoiarsk krai, but these accounted for less than 6 percent of the more than 100 million hectares of crops in those regions.[126] Thus the northern margins of arable land accounted for little of the total crop area devoted to corn, and corn occupied only a tiny fraction of their area. The low yields they grew determined a comparatively modest part of the overall yields for the USSR, which themselves remained low.[127]

Other regions replicated the transgressions of farms in Krasnoiarsk krai. In Briansk oblast, years of directives by local party and agricultural officials had achieved little, the inspectors concluded, "because these orders had not been accompanied by organizational work to train machine operators, collective farmers, and state-farm workers" in practices such as square-cluster planting.[128] Farms used their land—from the inspectors' point of view—irrationally, did not know how to plant corn properly, organized labor inefficiently, and calculated yields inaccurately. As a result, even their small harvests cost a lot to produce. Similar reports about individual districts, and about Orel and Penza oblasts, arrived at the same conclusions.[129] In Tambov oblast, local authorities sought to educate district officials in how to grow corn, but the farms did not implement the plan.[130] Almost universally, inspectors reported that even in the fourth year of Khrushchev's corn crusade, farms did not satisfactorily carry out basic tasks required to effectively plant, cultivate, and harvest corn. Other crops received their

---

[126] Jasny, *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*, 167–79.

[127] Average yields for 1960 compared favorably to other years in the 1960s. Grain yields amounted to 1.93 metric tons per hectare, including averages of 2.16 in the North Caucasus and 1.81 in Ukraine. USSR Council of Ministers Central Statistical Department, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSSR*, 178. Yields for fodder and silage were much lower than those Khrushchev considered sufficient to make corn an improvement on traditional crops, 25 tons per hectare. The USSR average yield for fodder and silage was 13.2 tons per hectare. By region, this ranged from the Baltic republics' average of 29.4 tons per hectare, to areas with large amounts of corn from which farms brought in little. Ukraine came in at only 14.7 tons per hectare, and the rich oblasts of central Russia's black-earth zone at only 16.9 tons. Ibid., 220.

[128] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, l. 16.

[129] For examples, see: GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, ll. 29–42. For districts in Orel oblast, see GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, ll. 95–103; and ll. 104–10

[130] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, l. 145.

attention, as farms assigned less suitable fields to corn, applied little fertilizer to them, doled out less labor, and concentrated on crops their managers deemed more profitable—typically because they required less time and labor to plant, cultivate, and harvest. Under these conditions, corn could hardly succeed.

Officials declined to plant or devote attention to corn for reasons that varied according to local conditions, but one case illustrates the kinds of opposition Khrushchev's corn crusade faced. The Briansk oblast inspectorate explained to superiors in Moscow that farms in Novozybkovsk district preferred familiar crops to corn. Managers remained faithful to lupine, a legume rich in protein, which replenished nitrogen in the soil and required little labor or machinery to plant and harvest. A report on the district details how corn required higher investments of labor, while yielding less than the alternative. Most collective farms planted between ten and thirty-five hectares of corn, a comparatively small quantity that allowed them to avoid accusations of neglecting the crop entirely. In 1955, the district's collective farms produced 50 percent of their silage from corn, a figure that fell to 30 percent in 1956 and a mere 8.7 percent in 1958. In that year, they produced only 3,000 metric tons of corn silage, less than one-tenth of the 31,000 tons they produced from lupine.[131] Yields of meat and milk rose in those years, suggesting the lupine was better adapted to the climate conditions and labor requirements the farms could sustain. Corn produced economical yields on only the best farms, whereas average ones produced less feed growing it, and at a cost up to five times higher. Lupine was superior, the local inspectors concluded, not only because officials did not ensure proper measures to grow corn, but also because lupine, "makes low demands on the soil, yields large crops without fertilizer, and requires insignificant amounts of labor." These characteristics allowed the "collective farms to receive cheap feed rich in protein, which livestock eat readily; moreover, the crop raises the fertility of the soil."[132] At least in the short term, local officials had

[131] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, l. 62.

[132] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, l. 63.

effectively dodged demands from above to plant corn, pursuing an alternative strategy that allowed them to raise output of meat and dairy products, the benchmarks that mattered most. These crops nonetheless came under increasing attack in Khrushchev's campaign in the years after 1958 to supplant those he dismissed as "low yielding" and labeled mere "grasses," favoring row crops grown using industrial farming technologies.

* * *

Moscow's policy initiatives required officials in local administrations and in ministries to cooperate. Those functionaries responded to Moscow's demands, but sometimes in ways that proved counterproductive, thereby hindering the strategies Khrushchev designed to achieve goals and held back progress as he defined it. Local party authorities and economic bureaucracies concealed their inability or unwillingness to follow orders from above, hoping to create at least the appearance that they had complied. They thus demonstrated doubt about corn that they could not express openly. In the mid 1950s, these actions coincided with the antibureaucracy campaign Khrushchev championed, an effort to make organizations carrying out economic policy more responsive to Moscow's orders. In increasing the Communist Party's duties to implement and oversee economic policies at the expense of the ministries, he did not eliminate their power. They, along with krai and oblast agricultural departments, local construction trusts, district bosses, and farm authorities, retained significant influence over policy outcomes.

Using his authority to make policy, Khrushchev steadfastly promoted the industrial farming methods and technologies Soviet farms needed to realize his vision of a modern system of agriculture. Efforts to put his vision of industrial corn cultivation into practice between 1955 and 1958 concentrated on introducing more machines, new hybrid corn varieties, and related technologies. Yet the evidence in this chapter also suggest that his policies were insufficient to realize his vision without additional heroic efforts to turn policy into practice. Local authorities

sidestepped expectations, seeking to create a façade that demonstrated compliance. Those obstacles grew after 1958, as officials adapted to Khrushchev's increasingly insistent demands to see industrial farming ideals in practice on Soviet farms. The strategies local authorities used evolved in tandem to Khrushchev's campaign for a modern Soviet socialist agriculture, which would not rely on the crops he denounced as "grasses," but instead required industrially farmed row crops such as corn.

CHAPTER 4

THE STRUGGLE FOR CORN: CENTER–LOCAL RELATIONS AND IMPLEMENTING POLICY

"Comrades!" Nikita Khrushchev thundered in a speech in Voronezh in February 1961, "We must strictly punish charlatans who try to embellish [their successes], and to hide the mistakes they've made." He then described a letter blowing the whistle on officials in the oblast: anticipating the First Secretary's arrival and the anger the sight of unharvested corn would elicit, the heads of collective and state farms located along Khrushchev's route ordered workers to attach a rail, requisitioned from a nearby railroad depot, to a tractor and use it to knock down corn in the fields. They thereby hoped to disguise the fact that the harvest, which they should have finished months earlier, remained incomplete. In the particular case described in the letter, the state farm lost the livestock feed grown on 300 hectares. Confirming the story, the investigating *Pravda* correspondent faced pressure from the oblast authorities to suppress his findings. The oblast's party boss, S. D. Khitrov, then lied to Khrushchev, claiming that this was simply a standard practice for gathering the corn plants for use as feed after the grain had been harvested by hand. "I will soon be sixty-seven years old," Khrushchev countered, "and I don't believe in such fairytales. . . . In reality, this was deceit (*ochkovtiratel'stvo*). Why did they do this? They wanted to deceive me."[1]

Considering Khitrov's deceit and similar cases, this chapter sheds light on center-periphery relations and the dynamics of how local party organizations implemented policies designed to make Khrushchev's vision of corn-based industrial farming a reality. I argue that relationships among local officials, the pressures the system placed on them to organize

[1] "Opiraias' na peredovom opyt i dostizheniia nauki, dobivat'sia obshchego pod"ema sel'skogo khoziaistva: Rech' tovarishcha N. S. Khrushcheva na soveshchanii peredovikov sel'skogo khoziaistva oblastei Tsentral'noi chernozemnoi zony Rossiiskoi Federatsii v gorode Voronezhe, 11 fevralia 1961 goda," *Pravda* (February 19, 1961): 3. The text can also be found in Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 5:35.

production, and the influence of superiors in Moscow combined to complicate orderly management of agriculture and hampered efforts to carry out corn-planting and meat-procurement campaigns. Acting within their regional networks, party leaders created the appearance that they had simultaneously raised dairy and meat output while pursuing policies Khrushchev deemed integral to his vision of abundance through industrial farming, especially plowing up pastures and replacing them with corn. I divide this chapter chronologically, with the scandals resulting from fraudulent procurements that rocked the Soviet Union in 1960 and 1961, most famously in Riazan, as the turning point. Before that, Khrushchev promoted strong regional leaders who appeared to secure the results he demanded; subsequently learning that the apparently successful secretaries had abused their powers, central authorities moved to combat the deception. They therefore worked to curb local authorities' power, resulting in the administrative reorganizations Khrushchev undertook between 1961 and 1964.

To understand regional party organizations, I draw on historian Oleg Khlevniuk's typology of regional leaders, how their networks operated, and how they responded to Khrushchev's campaigns. Khlevniuk identifies three kinds of networks and explains how each network came into being, interacted with superiors in Moscow, and either achieved some stability in personnel or fell victim to internal conflicts. The "dictator" secretary was secure in his power and authority over subordinates, directing a regional party organization exhibiting rigid hierarchy and populated by subordinates dependent on the good graces of the dictator for their job security.[2] The archetype for this style of regional secretary was A. N. Larionov of Riazan oblast, who responded with enthusiasm to Moscow's demands, appeared to meet them, and garnered resultant accolades. The opposite of the dictator, the "weak secretary" lacked the authority to verify that subordinates carried out commands, producing a network of competing interest groups. In such an arrangement, the region often failed to carry out Moscow's policies,

[2] Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR," 33–35. In this instance, "region" encompasses union-republic, krai, and oblast party organizations.

bringing officials from the Central Committee in to install a new secretary, perhaps a potential dictator.[3] The "norm-bound" network typically evolved from one or the other into a compromise between the two. Most common after Moscow authorities quashed the dictators whom they blamed for the scandals of 1960 and 1961, this type became almost universal under L. I. Brezhnev. In the compromise network, formal lines of power worked alongside patronage and cooperation among equals to ensure efficiency, stability and consensus that required little interference by Moscow to maintain.[4] Building on Khlevniuk's work, historian Yoram Gorlizki finds that regional party networks demonstrated the need for trust—to fulfill promises and not to betray illegal actions to higher authorities—among party officials for a region to function.[5] It took time to develop the relationships necessary for these ties: Gorlizki shows this by contrasting the dictatorial powers of Larionov with Kirov oblast's weak secretary, who lacked the power, authority, and established ties to subordinates in his network.

In examining how regional leaders and networks carried out policies related to corn and industrial agriculture, I use Khlevniuk's typology to make clearer the tangled lines of authority characteristic of center-periphery relations. I explain how officials attempted to secure their own power, to maintain it, and, where necessary, to implement policies. I therefore join recent trends in scholarship on the role of regions in the Soviet system. Early on, Jerry Hough demonstrated how regional leadership influenced industrial policy.[6] Typically, studies of the political system privileged individuals by viewing regions mainly as the launching pad for the careers of future leaders in Moscow, the path trodden by M. S. Gorbachev and many others.[7] Since the Soviet

---

[3] Ibid., 35–36.

[4] Ibid., 37–39.

[5] Yoram Gorlizki, "Scandal in Riazan: Networks of Trust and the Social Dynamics of Deception," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, no. 2 (2013): 243–78.

[6] Jerry Hough, *The Soviet Prefects: The Local Party Organs in Industrial Decision-Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

[7] Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR," 31. Gorbachev began his career as an official in the Stavropol city and krai Komsomol committees, and then advanced through the krai party committee.

archives became accessible, foreign scholars and those from post-Soviet countries alike have expanded interest in local history, including on important regions such as Riazan.[8] Historian E. A. Rees identifies "conflicting centripetal and centrifugal forces" that defined relationships between center and periphery, and concludes that centralization peaked under Stalin, while the Khrushchev period saw "a relative moderation" that enhanced local authority.[9] In his study of postwar regional elites, historian V. P. Mokhov argues that local party organizations exercised increasing influence over economic activity in the post-Stalin period.[10] Their authority grew further after Khrushchev's ouster: regional party secretaries under Brezhnev remained subject to Moscow's rules, but felt increasingly entrenched in their regions, an atmosphere defined by official emphasis on "stability in cadres." Secure from removal, they developed a style privileging informal operational norms and interpersonal relationships over formal procedures.[11]

* * *

Beginning in September 1953, Moscow pressured regional leaders to implement Khrushchev's agricultural policies. As early as March 1955, mere weeks after launching the corn crusade, he denounced those who merely sloganeered about corn but did not mobilize local efforts to realize the directives from Moscow. Khlevniuk finds that between 1953 and 1957, Khrushchev replaced many oblast party secretaries. By choosing potentially strong, even dictatorial secretaries to succeed them, the leader hoped to create hierarchies capable of efficiently executing his campaigns. Weak secretaries became targets for dismissal because they

---

[8] See, for example: A. F. Agarev, *Tragicheskaia avantiura: Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Riazanskoi oblasti, 1950-1960 gody; A. N. Larionov, N. S. Khrushchev i drugie; Dokumenty, sobytiia, fakty* (Riazan': Russkoe slovo, 2005).

[9] E. A. Rees, "Introduction," in *Centre-Local Relations in the Stalinist State, 1928-1941*, ed. E. A. Rees (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1.

[10] V. P. Mokhov, *Regional'naia politicheskaia elita Rossii, 1945–1991 gody* (Perm': Permskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2003), 13.

[11] Gorlizki, "Too Much Trust," 676–79.

failed to do so.[12] The secretaries who gained power and seats in the Central Committee owed their positions to Khrushchev, disposing them to support him against his rivals in the Presidium in June 1957.

During those four years (1953–57), Khrushchev used his power as head of the Central Committee Secretariat to replace at least half of the secretaries under his control, sacking those who did not meet his expectations in agriculture. For instance, Briansk oblast party secretary A. D. Bondarenko lost his post in January 1954 because the Central Committee singled out his slow and ineffective response to the September 1953 plenum's directives. Officials reported that the oblast's farms had not prepared for spring planting in general and for expanding the corn crop in particular. Once officials sent from Moscow opened the floor at a party meeting to criticism of Bondarenko, the complaints swelled into a wave. Local party officials, the secretary's subordinates, "sharply criticized members of the oblast committee bureau for rarely venturing into the districts; for seldom speaking with collective farmers, MTS workers, and district party activists; for uncritically evaluating the state of affairs in agriculture; and for accepting the serious shortcomings of the collective farms, MTSs, and state farms."[13] With Moscow's blessing, the plenum charged that Bondarenko "had not provided leadership," and replaced him with A. U. Petukhov, a functionary of the Central Committee apparat, a bullpen for potential regional bosses.[14] I. V. Storozhev, deputy chief of the Central Committee Department for Party Organizations, carried out Moscow's wishes by supervising similar transfers of power in Iaroslavl, Tula, Smolensk, and Kalinin oblasts. In summarizing that work, Storozhev characterized the scale of the problem Khrushchev confronted by writing, "Progress in organizational and political work in the locales . . . is weak. . . . Party activists do not struggle to

---

[12] Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR," 33–34.

[13] RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 149, ll. 6–9. This document, as well as the others similarly cited, are reproduced in full or in part in the document collection edited by Khlevniuk. Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 57.

[14] Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 58.

develop agriculture." Linking these regions' failures to the contemporaneous campaign against red tape, Storozhev concluded, "The actual business [of agricultural reform] drowns in a flood of directives."[15]

Censuring those regional authorities he considered lax, Khrushchev pressured them to address apparent failures. The case of the Moscow oblast party committee and its response to the corn crusade is illustrative. At the Central Committee plenum in January 1955, the First Secretary expressed displeasure with his successor as head of the oblast party committee, I. V. Kapitonov. Acknowledging that the previous year had witnessed "very serious shortcomings in cultivating corn, for which Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev justifiably criticized us in his report," Kapitonov outlined measures designed to guarantee future success.[16] Still dissatisfied, on the plenum's final day Khrushchev criticized bureaucratic practices that ensured that no one effectively managed the economy. "There are so many [officials], but the task is a failure," he lamented. "Why?" he asked rhetorically, "Because, comrades, of the many windy speeches made up of stock slogans. . . . They repeat [them], but they don't know how to plant [corn] and care for it. . . . My fellow Muscovites, for example, [have] plenty of land . . . and a propagandist for every hectare, but [the oblast's] corn has failed." Khrushchev continued his broadside: "Why? Because, Comrade Kapitonov, there were very many speeches and very little comprehension. That is the only way to explain it. They blathered and blathered, but at the end of the year there was nothing to harvest."[17] Whether, like Bondaerenko, they lost their secretaryships, or, like Kapitonov, they did not, secretaries became vulnerable for failing to pursue the corn crusade with sufficient vigor to satisfy Khrushchev.

As a result, the Moscow oblast committee stepped up the campaign for corn, holding

---

[15] RGASPI, f. 82, op. 2, d. 153, ll. 202–5, cited in: Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 73.

[16] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 121, l. 66.

[17] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 126, l. 119.

conferences and meetings on the subject throughout 1955. In June 1955, an oblast committee plenum featured speakers who declared corn "a crop of decisive significance" in raising meat and dairy output.[18] "It is impossible to say that . . . measures for fulfilling the directives of the January Central Committee plenum went smoothly and without mistakes," the secretary of a district party committee admitted. The campaign against red tape meant that officials had to acknowledge management failures: "For this we were justifiably criticized in the regional newspaper . . . in an article entitled 'Without leaving the office.'"[19] Each subsequent speaker also described what the district or farm organization under his leadership had done to grow corn and meet goals for meat and dairy output.

Success in Moscow region remained elusive, but pressure from Khrushchev forced them to continue their efforts. In July 1955, the oblast agriculture department found the state of corn cultivation on farms "unsatisfactory." A number of farms, MTSs, and districts had put some effort into weeding the corn plantings, but a great many had done little. As a result, the director of the oblast agricultural department reprimanded many officials in charge of various MTSs, and fired one MTS director for failing to organize work needed to grow corn.[20] In January 1956, the regional authorities held a conference at which political leaders and researchers evaluated the past year's results and offered advice about how to select the best plots of land, to plant, to cultivate, and to harvest. Many recommendations repeated Khrushchev's principles, while some—to plant not two or three grains in a cluster, but six or even eight—diverged from them.[21] Others frankly admitted "widespread misfortunes with the corn crop in 1955." Although the

---

[18] TsAOPIM, f. 3, op. 159, d. 6, l. 7.

[19] TsAOPIM, f. 3, op. 159, d. 6, l. 39. For similar examples from the spring planting in May 1955, see: TsAOPIM, f. 3, op. 159, d. 6, l. 39.

[20] TsGAMO, f. 191, op. 1, d. 2152, ll. 28–32. To illustrate, the collective farms served by the Mytishchi MTS had weeded 96.8 percent of their corn plantings at least once, and 65 percent of them a second time. In the territory of Podol'sk MTS, by contrast, farms had weeded only 39.7 percent the first time and none a second time; in some cases, entire collective farms had not begun the vital work.

[21] TsGAMO, f. 191, op. 1, d. 2305, l. 12.

oblast's corn plantings had expanded fivefold over the 1954 figure, reaching 91,000 hectares, or 19 percent of grain plantings, only a few farms brought in a fruitful harvest.[22] This was, the oblast party leaders claimed, the fault of local leaders who "gave less attention, . . . did not demonstrate sufficient care, and allowed . . . unorganized and untimely execution of work."[23]

* * *

Regional leaders were coerced to plant corn, procure grain, and execute Moscow's directives. This pressure came from Khrushchev and, behind the scenes, from powerful officials such as the leader's right-hand man, V. P. Mylarshchikov, head of the Central Committee's Agricultural Department for the RSFSR from 1954 to 1959.[24] That post positioned Mylarshchikov to manage the information flowing to the Presidium, and to work with the First Secretary to shape policy as one of his *sel'skokhoziaistvenniki*, or personal agricultural advisors. Proximity to Khrushchev gave him authority exceeding his formal powers, which he used to enforce Moscow's policies in the RSFSR's regions. He earned respect and fear in that capacity, embodying the rude, brusque, and pugnacious leader characteristic of the "little Stalin," the dictatorial leader whom writer Ilya Ehrenburg captured in the antihero, factory director I. V. Zhuravlev, of his epochal novel *The Thaw*. Documents and memoirs alike speak to Mylarshchikov's actions, their effect, and the impression they created in regions across the RSFSR.[25]

---

[22] TsGAMO, f. 191, op. 1, d. 2306, ll. 10–11.

[23] TsGAMO, f. 191, op. 1, d. 2306, ll. 21.

[24] Mylarshchikov served as a subordinate to Khrushchev on the Moscow oblast party committee from 1951 to 1953. Strelianyi, "The Last Romantic," 650 f. 115. For more on the Central Committee apparat, its powers, and its evolution in the Khrushchev period, see: Alexander Titov, "The Central Committee Apparatus under Khrushchev," 41–60, in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964*, ed. Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilič. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 73 (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[25] In Stavropol krai, for instance, he attended a party conference where the party leaders addressed charges that they had come up short in grain procurements. Unfortunately, but perhaps tellingly, the Stavropol krai committee's file on the meeting does not record his speech; it notes only that

Earning a fearsome reputation as a troubleshooter, Mylarshchikov executed Khrushchev's orders by ensuring that oblasts planted corn, supplied grain for state procurement, and fulfilled a host of related tasks. In December 1956, M. P. Karpenko, deputy minister of agriculture for the RSFSR, wrote to Khrushchev outlining a case, based on personal experience, against the Central Committee operative. First, Karpenko referred to events during his previous posting in Siberia's Krasnoiarsk krai, where the party secretary, N. N. Organov, had gained fame for surpassing state grain procurement quotas in 1955. Karpenko bemoaned how Organov had intimidated farms to sell grain to the state above and beyond the plan, even to the point of forcing them to sell grain set aside to pay farmers or to plant the next year's crop. Listening to Karpenko's protests, Organov explained that he understood these actions' disastrous effects, but also "alluded to compulsion by Comrade Mylarshchikov" and explained that he had to obey orders from the Central Committee to procure the grain at any cost. To meet those demands, the leaders of the krai took actions they considered "irresponsible" and "counter to their party conscience." Any who spoke out, however, faced firing and blacklisting.[26]

Karpenko's letter observes that Mylarshchikov's detrimental influence had become more evident once Karpenko had moved to Moscow to become a deputy minister, a post giving him a republic-wide perspective. For instance, inspections in Krasnodar krai, a southern grain-producing region rapidly expanding its corn plantings, had revealed irregularities in procurements there. Local authorities had filled out paperwork attesting to sale to the state of 10,000 metric tons of corn, in reality unharvested in the fields. This ploy ensured that annual procurement plans appeared fulfilled, even when they were not. Karpenko also saw the corrupting hand of Khrushchev's own aide in this case.

> Who spreads this antigovernment practice around the country? Why is this done? Does it not happen in the wake of the one considered a practical, competent organizer of grain procurement? I have mentioned Comrade Mylarshchikov's

---

Mylarshchikov was present, but not the content of any speech he gave. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7072, l. 1.

[26] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 157, l. 141.

> name many times. I have the impression that it has some kind of magic power; people speak [of him] as an omnipotent figure, one whom they especially fear.[27]

In early 1957, investigators corroborated the charges Karpenko made about Krasnodar krai, blaming the chairman of the krai soviet, B. F. Petukhov. He and an official in the krai's procurement agency had "given verbal orders to district soviets and procurement agencies" to make up the collective farms' shortfall in corn purchases by accepting other grains while recording that they had delivered corn. This cost the state some 3.6 million rubles. Echoing Karpenko's language, the inspectors termed these actions "antigovernment behavior," and demanded that Petukhov appear before authorities in Moscow to account for himself.[28]

According to Karpenko, Mylarshchikov backed flagrant abuses of power with threats and curses. Karpenko resisted Mylarshchikov's illegal orders, which the latter met with "all manner of insults." His description of the dictatorial department head as "rude, haughty, irascible, and vindictive" is corroborated by others' testimony.[29] In his memoir, party secretary first in Novosibirsk oblast and then in Iaroslavl oblast F. I. Loshchenkov characterized Mylarshchikov as "a rude man, considerate of no one." Regional and ministerial officials' protests to Khrushchev achieved nothing, as Mylarshchikov continued "to mercilessly force [oblast leaders] to expand corn plantings."[30] Such dictatorial behavior served as a model for subordinates, who took the aggressive, unhesitating approach apparently necessary to carry out Moscow's orders. Karpenko concluded that Mylarshchikov's actions in grain campaigns "taught people [to act] in such a way that the grain [procured] becomes bittersweet."[31] Complaints by Karpenko, Loshchenkov, and others failed to rein in Mylarshchikov. Khrushchev noted in the margin of

---

[27] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 157, ll. 146–47.

[28] GARF, f. A-259, op. 7, d. 8050, ll. 44–46.

[29] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 157, ll. 146–47.

[30] F. I. Loshchenkov, *Ot Stalina do Gorbacheva: Zhizennye nabliudeniia* (Iaroslavl': Izdatel'stvo LIA, 2000), 29.

[31] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 157, l. 150.

Karpenko's letter only that he had read it on December 28, 1956, but Mylarshchikov remained in his post for more than two years afterward, until 1959.

The chairman of a collective farm in Stavropol krai wrote to N. A. Bulganin, the Soviet premier, describing this pressure to sell grain, seemingly at odds with the more relaxed post-Stalin atmosphere. Among all those Bulganin's office received, the chairman's letter was selected for inclusion in a summary about attitudes about agricultural affairs, meaning it is neither typical nor representative; however, the letter documents the coercion collective farms faced. The writer apparently intended to remain partially anonymous: he signed the letter and indicated the district, Georgievsk, but the signature was illegible. The writing of someone with formal education, the text itself evokes the scene. The chairman begged Bulganin to dispatch investigators to uncover the problems in the krai:

> Please get to the bottom of this, send people from the Central Committee. Only let them be judicious, not like those from the bureau of the krai party committee, who threaten the collective farm chairmen: 'If you don't meet wool procurements, we're going to shear you and fulfill the plan that way.' I came to agriculture from industry, and have fallen in love with it despite all of its unbelievable difficulties. I will say that [the bosses] do not value, do not like, and want neither to hear nor to understand the people who work on these dusty steppes in rain and snow.

He then described the pressure that collective farms faced to sell grain to the state, even at the expense of their daily operations or the wellbeing of the collective farmers. He did not understand "why the Central Committee's published resolutions, even after Stalin's death, diverge from the actual state of affairs." Officials in Moscow and the krai administration "continued to sugar-coat things" by forcing the farms to write five-year development plans, but "when it comes to the root of the matter, we forget about them." Under the conditions his collective farm faced, there was nothing to pay the farmers for their labor, and therefore they justifiably refused to work until they could earn wages permitting them to purchase the flour and other goods they needed. The chairman condemned the krai officials for their actions in such situations: "They holler, 'Give up the grain!' and the krai party committee secretary, Comrade Lebedev, declares that the collective farmers instead 'can pig out on corn' (*budut zhrat'*

kukuruzy)."[32] The phrase captures the official's equal contempt for the peasants and for corn: a feed fit only for animals, a judgment reinforced by the verb "*zhrat',*" which connotes not eating, but consuming messily, greedily, in an animal-like fashion.

* * *

This pressure created an atmosphere in which the regional networks responsible for carrying out Khrushchev's corn crusade had incentives to push an initiative beyond its limits. After Stalin died, Khrushchev and the party leaders purposefully strengthened the regions, as Khlevniuk emphasizes, to make them tools to achieve practical results. The new strong secretaries brought their subordinates under tight control, becoming "secretary-dictators" well placed to carry out Moscow's "adventuristic" policies. Having proven themselves by achieving results, the secretary-dictators could call on powerful backers in Moscow to intervene on their behalf, solving conflicts and shielding their regions from any suspicion of wrongdoing.[33] This self-reinforcing process helped A. N. Larionov become so prominent. In August 1958, for instance, he complained to Khrushchev that inspectors from Moscow came to his region more frequently only because it was nearby.[34] Larionov tried to use his influence in Moscow to deflect attention from his oblast at a time when investigations might have uncovered the systematic fraud underway that year, the one before the famous meat procurement scandal.[35] Drawing on several helpful studies of the infamous event, a brief summary of the scandal reveals several key elements of center-local relations.

All along, regional leaders were responsible for agricultural production and for managing appearances, but that pressure grew after 1957. Problems arose in cases where the secretary-

---

[32] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 90, d. 1298, ll. 99–101.

[33] Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR," 31.

[34] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 14, d. 106, ll. 59–63.

[35] For more on the frauds of 1958, see: Gorlizki, "Scandal in Riazan," 258.

dictator aggressively pursued Moscow's campaigns to appear even more successful and receive even more acclaim.[36] Instead of growing and producing more, they made outlandish promises to double and triple deliveries of meat or dairy products, backing them with fraud to create the image of success. The managers in charge of farms, districts, oblasts, and republics reported in ways that cast themselves in the best light, feeding the chronic "data inflation" of the Soviet system.[37] Khrushchev's exhortation for the USSR to "catch up with and overtake America" catalyzed efforts that turned into a runaway chain-reaction. Through 1959, events seemed to bear out his belief in the revolutionary leaps forward in output made possible by new technology and by thorough use of productive capacities already existing in the countryside. Secretary-dictators appeared to provide the needed leadership, and Larionov was foremost among them

Riazan oblast worked a "miracle" that evolved first into farce and only later into a tragedy. Having apparently boosted milk output in 1958, Larionov pledged that his oblast's farms would deliver outlandishly large quantities of meat in 1959. It seemed that his leadership had brought to life Khrushchev's dreams of an agricultural revolution on the cheap. In his history of the Riazan affair, A. F. Agarev concludes that Moscow's influence proved the decisive cause.[38] Fresh off a small victory in 1958, Riazan oblast leaders responded to the December 1958 Central Committee plenum by proposing an objective of 75,000 metric tons of meat, 150 percent of the planned quota for the year. The day before an oblast conference was to formally adopt the pledge, Mylarshchikov arrived from Moscow armed with orders from Khrushchev. The Central Committee functionary forced Larionov to name not that ambitious target, but one twice as high.[39] Praise rained on the Riazanites as they reported first 100,000 and then 150,000 tons

---

[36] Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR," 47.

[37] For more on this phenomenon, see: Oleg V. Khlevniuk, "The Economy of Illusions: The Phenomenon of Data-Inflation in the Khrushchev Era," 171–89, in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964*, ed. Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilič. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 73 (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[38] Others have reached this conclusion, for example: Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 96–97.

[39] Agarev, *Tragicheskaia avantiura*, 25.

delivered. Leaders earned prestigious awards and the oblast received the Order of Lenin; the press made them a model for all others by trumpeting the "success" on the front page of *Pravda*.

In fact, Riazan was a model for all, as similar frauds occurred commonly, if nowhere else so concentrated or spectacular. To meet quotas, farms slaughtered animals of all types, including dairy cattle and calves. They bought peasants' private livestock and passed it off to the state as their own production. When these methods proved sufficient only for the first 100,000 metric tons of meat, oblast representatives traveled by night to neighboring oblasts to buy animals, selling them as if they had been raised locally. Pressed to meet soaring expectations, individuals and institutions bought meat, butter, and other goods in stores and sold them to the state as if they were new output. Rumors of duplicity became too loud to ignore only as 1960 wore on. Confronted with evidence of the crime and Moscow's anger, Larionov took his own life, damaging the legitimacy of Khrushchev's agricultural reforms and leaving the oblast with exhausted farms incapable of meeting even the modest quotas characteristic of years before 1958.[40] In late 1959 or early 1960, Mylarshchikov left the Central Committee to become head of a conglomerate of state farms in Moscow oblast. It is possible that this was a demotion in response to his role in the still-hidden affair, but it seems unlikely, especially in light of his promotion to head the RSFSR Ministry of Agricultural Production and Procurements by 1963.

In 1961, the Central Committee began to take a hard line on regional leaders and party organizations. Khlevniuk's study of regional networks finds a campaign to stamp out *pripiski*—fraudulent additions of fictive production to statistics—and related schemes, as "scandals of various grades of intensity swept through the majority of regions." The secretaries and other local authorities that fell victim had responded too enthusiastically to Khrushchev's calls to boost production and compete with the USA.[41] Gorlizki underscores how the scandals went farthest where a secretary-dictator headed a network of subordinates with stable tenure: only

[40] Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 376–78; and Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 98–101.

[41] Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 13.

there had they established enough trust in each other to launch such schemes and conceal them from outside authorities. Like any large criminal enterprise, the subterfuge was possible only because each official could depend on the others to remain silent about the fraud, to suppress complaints by their own subordinates, and to remain unified against any superior asking questions.[42] Larionov had been a model "secretary-dictator," and his fall proved a template for these scandals. Khrushchev and other party leaders in Moscow understood the danger and set about cleaning the slate only in 1961, at the cost of the prestige of the party and of Khrushchev. This also created an environment in which Khlevniuk's norm-bound or compromise network became the most common, a trend that culminated when that type of network became almost universal under Brezhnev.[43] For instance, Gorlizki sees a typical example of this type of secretary in G. S. Zolotoukhin. After decade leading Tambov oblast, Zolotoukhin was reassigned to Krasnodar krai in 1967. There, he secured substantial authority, but nonetheless respected seniority in approving promotions; moreover he encouraged "propriety and decorum" among party officials instead of shouting at and insulting them.[44]

Documents also attest to how local officials colluded with authorities in Moscow. Central Committee officials such as Mylarshchikov developed ties to the regional leaders, including Larionov, which encouraged all to cover up the falsifications in procurements. The post-Riazan campaign was above all designed to break those connections.[45] Hoping to gain prominence through the apparent success of farms, districts, or oblasts under their supervision, officials in Moscow or republic administrations arranged credits, cajoled officials, or procured needed resources. In this, they mimicked the efforts required to create a Stakhanovite in the 1930s or a Hero of Socialist Labor in the 1950s. Memoir accounts suggest that officials in Moscow knew

---

[42] Gorlizki, "Scandal in Riazan," 273–77.

[43] Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR," 47.

[44] Gorlizki, "Too Much Trust," 692.

[45] Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 13.

about these actions, providing tacit approval even if they did not order them. When KGB chairman A. N. Shelepin and P. N. Doroshenko, the head of the Central Committee's Agricultural Department for Union Republics, investigated reports before the scandal broke in Riazan, they aroused the anger of Central Committee secretary N. G. Ignatov, who chastised them for casting doubt on the star of the show.[46] Letters arriving in Moscow complained that officials sent to inspect the oblast neither knew about nor cared about such violations of legality and conscience, confirming an established pattern. A young functionary in the Central Committee Propaganda Department, G. L. Smirnov discovered *pripiski* and other frauds in Kazakhstan's Pavlodar oblast in 1959. Agriculture lay outside his responsibility, but he dutifully reported his findings to his superiors, who warned him not to pursue the issue.[47]

Although most cheating overstated deliveries to the state of meat, dairy, and eggs, these frauds sometimes involved further deception in accounting for corn plantings and harvests. An anonymous letter to authorities in Moscow charged that M. M. Stakhurskii, party secretary of Ukraine's Zhytomyr oblast, had encouraged and even required subordinates to deceptively record their corn crops. These measures caused real production to fall, reversing gains made between 1953 and 1958. Stakhurskii ordered efforts "'to improve the situation' somehow, [to make the oblast] appear in a better light to the republic leaders." He and his subordinates therefore "embarked on direct but poorly disguised fraud in yields, gross harvest, and output of meat and dairy products." The accounting maneuvers they used made the harvest of corn silage, actually 12–13 metric tons per hectare, appear twice as large. Collective and state farms planted many more hectares of corn than the plan ordered, brought in all of them, and then claimed the full amount of corn harvested while reporting that they had planted only the number of hectares

---

[46] "Khrushchevskie vremena: Neprinuzhdennye besedy s politicheskimi deiateliami 'velikogo desiatiletiia'; A. N. Shelepin, V. E. Semichastnyi, N. G. Egorychev; Zapisi N. A. Barsukova," in *Neizvestnaia Rossiia XX vek*, vol. 1 (Moscow: "Istoricheskoe nasledie," 1992), 275.

[47] G. L. Smirnov, "Malenkie sekrety bol'shogo doma: Vospominaniia o rabote v apparate TsK KPSS," in *Neizvestnaia Rossiia XX vek*, vol. 3, ed. V. A. Kozlov, et al. (Moscow: "Istoricheskoe nasledie," 1993), 372.

designated in the plan, artificially raising the average yield.[48] The following year, in 1961, the head of the USSR Statistical Department V. N. Starovskii informed the Central Committee that this practice had been widespread.[49]

Stakhurskii attempted rule as a dictator, but disaster befell him because he did not have the required authority and trust among his subordinates. The anonymous letter from Zhytomyr oblast further detailed how Stakhurskii's henchmen made district secretaries force collective farms to take such actions; this suggests that the writer was one of them. Describing Stakhurskii's behavior, the letter highlights his obstinacy, unwillingness to listen to others, and inclination to pressure subordinates, all actions of a secretary–dictator.[50] The Ukrainian Central Committee reported to Moscow that they had removed Stakhurskii from his post because of his leadership style, omitting the question of fraud in corn planting altogether.[51] A weak secretary, Stakhurskii had not established enough trust—or fear—to prevent a subordinate from blowing the whistle. Unable to keep the fraud hidden and lacking the authority to force compliance, weak secretaries struggled to carry out Moscow's directives and to conceal any under-the-table efforts to do so, bringing down this sort of retribution from superiors.[52] The circumstances suggest that Stakhurskii resembled not A. N. Larionov, but A. P. Pcheliakov of Kirov oblast, whom Gorlizki casts as a archetypical weak secretary.[53]

So was A. M. Naumenko, party boss of Ukraine's Sumy oblast. In early 1961, he faced charges almost identical to those leveled at Stakhurskii. Authorities in Kyiv sent investigators to get to the bottom of a letter alleging that crops remained unharvested in the oblast, and that the

---

[48] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 144, ll. 73–82, cited in: Khlevniuk, ed. *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 257.

[49] GARF, f. R-5446, op. 95, d. 327, ll. 2–12, cited in: Ibid., 345.

[50] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 144, ll. 73–82, cited in: Ibid., 259.

[51] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 144, l. 183, cited in: Ibid., 260–61, fn. 2.

[52] Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR," 47.

[53] Gorlizki, "Scandal in Riazan," 265–73.

Naumenko was rude and abusive. Those dispatched to look into the complaints found that it had not been written by a local Supreme Soviet deputy, a claim probably intended to lend greater credibility to its indictment.[54] Even though some charges proved untrue, inspectors nonetheless began to look into events in the oblast. This illustrates why secretaries often tried to "suppress criticism," as the sources term it, and present the best possible face to outsiders. Before the Riazan scandal broke, central authorities had largely ignored violations; new emphasis on the problem afterward meant that officials had to cover their tracks. An ill-placed step might spur a disgruntled member of a regional party network to write a letter revealing to authorities what everyone knew, or at least what was rumored. That act summoned inspectors into the region to discover all manner of unpleasantries. In Naumenko's case, this resulted in the Central Committee secretary F. R. Kozlov's order to N. I. Podgornyi, chief of the Ukrainian party, "to administer harsh justice" to the perpetrators.[55]

Cases similar to those of Naumenko and Stakhurskii proved widespread. Chief procurator of the USSR R. A. Rudenko reported to the Central Committee that authorities had begun prosecution for fraud in nearly 300 cases in the first half of 1961 alone, most of them in agriculture.[56] Party committees in every republic, krai, and oblast held meetings on the issue, which brought still more charges into the open. On a collective farm in Ukraine's Vinnytsia oblast, peasants denounced the chairman for falsely reporting sale of 100 hogs, as well as planting of 106 hectares of wheat and barley, and 628 hectares of corn.[57] The Central Committee also learned of a district in Odessa oblast where officials reported that all corn had been

---

[54] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, l. 9.

[55] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, l. 19.

[56] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 167, ll. 108–37, cited in: Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 367.

[57] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 167, l. 3. The chairman of the Sverdlov collective in Kursk oblast added 20 hectares of potatoes and 58 hectares of corn to the accounts. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 167, l. 18. Other incidents in Ukraine involved quantities as little as 30 hectares or as many as 164 hectares. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 167, l. 74.

harvested, when in fact nearly 10 percent remained in the fields.[58] Officials in oblast and krai offices responsible for statistics also made mistakes or purposefully passed on inaccurate data.[59] In the end, a Central Committee functionary concluded, "The formalistic approach to considering the letter [requiring meetings and action against fraudulent reporting] means that instances of deceit continue to exist even now, when the question of the struggle against *pripiski* had already been discussed."[60]

The wave of scandals that swept across the USSR also included false accounting for planting, harvesting, and yields of corn. More than making corn merely a footnote in the larger and well-known story of frauds, this fact reinforces earlier findings about the divergence between appearance and substance in economic management—even far from the famous example of Riazan's miraculous meat and dairy procurements. Finally, only those unlucky enough to be caught made it into a report such as Rudenko's, meaning that reporting on cheating remained sporadic and incomplete. Any estimate of the scope and scale of fraud would have to conclude that it was substantial and widespread. Together, these facts indicate that summary figures for corn planting, although the only statistics we have, should not be taken at face value.

* * *

Although the leaders of "Red Plowman" collective farm in Ukraine's Kyiv oblast carried out fraud resulting in a scandal typical for the period, a memoir reveals participants' motivations and sheds light on the atmosphere of the time. In a memoir published in the 1990s, P. E. Shelest recounts serving as secretary of the oblast party committee in 1961. In part comprised of diary entries, his narrative records his rise from aviation engineer to offices in district, city, oblast,

[58] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, l. 20.

[59] Cases of fraud and a corresponding lax attitude toward the quality and veracity of data became known in Stavropol krai. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8597, ll. 9–11.

[60] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 167, l. 7.

and republic party organizations. Benefitting from Podgornyi's patronage, Shelest became head of the oblast in the mid 1950s, after which he navigated the era's Riazan-like scandals. Taking pains to portray himself in the best possible light, he frankly discusses the Khrushchev era in all its complexities. He mixes dismay at the period's turmoil with a nostalgia for it that is not surprising given his experience after 1964, which ended in his fall in 1971 from the post of first secretary of the Ukrainian party as a consequence of conflicts with Brezhnev.

In late 1954, Shelest was promoted to the post of second secretary of the Kyiv oblast committee. To support their choice, authorities in Kyiv submitted to the Central Committee in Moscow a report on his prior work in the city committee and as a factory director. They characterized him as "energetic," "experienced in party and economic affairs," and "possessing organizing talents, initiative, and determination," all boilerplate terminology.[61] He served in the oblast committee under G. E. Girshko, whom Shelest praises as a respected colleague while bluntly terming his leadership style ineffective. Although Grishko shouted at subordinates, he demanded too little of them.[62] In 1954, Grishko fell ill, leaving Shelest to act as first secretary. He had to struggle to control the district committees, turn around the oblast's lagging farms, and establish his own authority. He achieved this goal by emulating Khrushchev's leadership style. "There was no corner of the oblast, its enterprises, farms, or fields I did not personally visit," he writes, "speaking with the people; observing what they did in the fields; and listening to their advice, suggestions, and demands."[63] He cultivated relationships with individuals, rather than relying on the oblast committee's administrative apparatus or on the district committees. Shelest describes a meeting with a collective farm's business manager to learn details about life on the farm. He thus learned about peasants who secretly distilled moonshine, news that was

[61] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 13, ll. 48–49.

[62] Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 112.

[63] Ibid., 117.

unlikely to reach him through official channels.[64] He visited collective farms unannounced, discovering in several cases district officials forcing collective farmers to exceed their procurement plans or to replace chairmen supported by the peasants with candidates more amenable to the district bosses' arbitrary orders. Only Shelest's intervention prevented such violations of "collective farm democracy" and abuses of authority by the district party committees.[65] Getting his hands dirty, he devoted between 75 and 80 percent of his time to managing agriculture, despite training as an engineer and repeated statements that he preferred industry.[66]

Although on their front lines, Shelest downplayed his own involvement when addressing the scandals that shook center–periphery relationships. Protective of subordinates while disgusted by their actions, he blamed Khrushchev for creating the conditions that drove good communists to fraud. News from Riazan of spectacular surges in production agitated Shelest: an entry under February 21, 1960, describes his discomfort with the campaign that resulted when Moscow and Khrushchev himself harangued other party committees for failing to equal that "success," requiring each oblast to reproduce it on local farms but giving them no time to actually increase output. "In our souls, neither Podgornyi, with whom I have spoken several times, nor I agree with such methods," Shelest wrote. "Shameful phenomena, lying and double-dealing," he termed them in another entry from that year.[67] Yet the feverish atmosphere of the campaign forced him, like the all others, to "make a wager" on a farm, mimicking the supposedly miraculous increases in production achieved in Riazan. Shelest had previously proven himself willing to protect subordinates: he took action against perpetrators only when newspaper reports brought their shortcomings to light. In December 1959, the secretaries of the Berezansk

[64] Ibid., 123.

[65] Ibid., 119–20 and 127.

[66] Ibid., 128.

[67] Ibid., 134–35.

district party committee were punished for fraud and related offenses only after an article denouncing them appeared in *Izvestiia*, the newspaper of the central government in Moscow.[68]

The model farm in Shelest's Kyiv oblast was the "*Chervoniy khliborob*," or "Red Plowman" collective farm of Obukhov district. Needing to promote such a farm, Shelest formulated a plan with its chairman, I. F. Kabanets, and its party secretary. Shelest described the chairman as an honest and scrupulous leader, one whom Khrushchev had met and praised for his business-like approach and practical knowledge.[69] Kabanets had received accolades and had given a speech on his work at the December 1959 Central Committee plenum, a rare honor. In response to the apparent success of Riazan oblast, the farm's leaders redoubled their efforts and escalated promises of meat and dairy deliveries. Large investments of money supported legitimate measures, but illicit efforts followed. Shelest lamented to his diary, "This is double-dealing and adventurism! But there is nowhere to run, and we cannot lag behind. I reported to Podgornyi and he, much as I have, 'gave his approval.'"[70] The tone of this passage—signaled by the quotation marks surrounding the phrase—indicates trepidation, but it also most likely reflects the consequences of which Shelest knew only afterward, including the punishment meted out to those responsible for fraud. Although it is possible that even at the time Shelest harbored such reservations, he had to remain silent about his discomfort with the overall situation because of the reigning campaign mentality. He thus tacitly condoned the actions needed to meet Khrushchev's pressing demands. Outlandish pledges and their fulfillment by any means proved the only possible strategy, at least in the short term, to shield regional leaders from such pressure from above.

At first, the Red Plowman collective farm appeared resoundingly successful, bringing praise for Kabanets and Shelest. In 1960, the results looked excellent on paper: the collective

---

[68] A. Kozlov and P. Filimonov, "Berezanskie ochkovtirateli," *Izvestiia* (December 17, 1959): 2.

[69] Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 130.

[70] Ibid., 137–38.

produced more and paid its collective farmers well. The capstone of the chairman's twenty-five years of leading the farm, this success received glowing publicity in central newspapers and earned him a citation as a Hero of Socialist Labor, one of the USSR's most prestigious awards. In January 1961, Shelest addressed the Central Committee plenum on agriculture, where he reported glowingly on the farm's output, staking his own prestige and that of his patron, Podgornyi, on the farm's reputation.[71]

Ominous rumors began to circulate that hinted at prohibited practices, falsified reports, fraudulent sales to the state, and violations of the collective farm's charter. The dam burst in March 1961, when inspectors from the Central Committee arrived from Moscow to investigate these charges and other "charming things," as Shelest sardonically termed them in his private writings. He wrote that all of these "unpleasant affairs, if they are confirmed, are bad; but if they are not confirmed, a black shadow has fallen [anyway]."[72]

In early April, inspectors V. V. Vasil'ev and P. A. Provotorov arrived from Moscow, confirmed the allegations, and forced local officials to punish the guilty.[73] The managers of the Red Plowman collective farm had systematically purchased meat, milk, and other commodities from collective farmers and other private individuals to resell to the government disguised as the farm's production. Official directives had, however, expressly condemned this common practice. "Comrade Kabanets," the inspectors concluded, "transformed the collective farm into a procurements office, tasked not with producing agricultural goods, but with double-dealing (*ochkovtiratel'stvo*)." More than half of the production of 1960 had been the result of this scheme, in which the farm purchased animals—perhaps by pressuring the seller—from individual collective farmers and resold them without adding value by fattening them. The

[71] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, l. 42.

[72] Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 144.

[73] According to documents in RGANI, the second inspector's family name was Provotorov, not Privalov, as Shelest stated. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, l. 40.

inspectors found, moreover, that the oblast committee under Shelest's guidance had scrutinized the farm's operations in March 1960. That probe had uncovered infractions sufficient to earn Kabanets and Miroshnichenko only a minor reprimand and warning, which Moscow's investigators condemned as "superficial" in light of the new discoveries.[74]

In March and April 1961, the investigation found infractions beyond the procurement irregularities. Kabanets had hired individuals, not collective farm members, to organize the purchases, rural counterparts to an industrial enterprise's "expeditor," or *tolkach*—the word literally describes a simple tool used to apply force to an object, a "pusher." These semilegal figures used connections, barter, and bribes to smooth out irregularities in the supply system, locating necessary materials in time to fulfill production plans.[75] The rural expeditor used similar means to slightly different ends: the Red Plowman farm's buyers, each a resident of the nearby city of Kyiv, had spent over 4.5 million rubles in buying livestock for resale to the state. They had disbursed significantly more than the 3 million rubles in credit Shelest had arranged to help the farm expand production capacity. Each of the three buyers earned for his efforts some 44,000 (old) rubles, a substantial sum at a time when a collective farmer might receive approximately ten rubles for a day's work, and frequently much less.[76] Their given names—Ziama, Avram, and Khaim—and family names furthermore suggest that they were Jewish. Given common stereotypes about the inclination of members of that ethnoreligious community to economic activities the state deemed illicit, those who read the report by Vasil'ev and Provotorov might have lent this identity significance. The documents in the Central Committee's archive

---

[74] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, l. 43.

[75] For more on the *tolkach*, see: Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours*, 25. These individuals turn up in archival documents when they behaved badly, suggesting that officials tolerated them as necessary for certain tasks. For example, see the case of a state farm in Altai territory that resulted in the local authorities referring one "*ekspeditor*" for prosecution on charges of theft. GARF, f. R-8300, op. 24, d. 1363a, ll. 4–5. Similarly, a report to the Central Committee quietly recognizes the presence of "representatives" of northern regions in the North Ossetian ASSR tasked with ensuring deliveries of seed corn from that republic in the North Caucasus. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 381, l. 57.

[76] The figure of 4.5 million rubles amounted to $1.125 in 1960, or nearly $9 million in 2013, making this a large operation. The sum of 44,000 rubles equaled about $11,000, or approximately $85,000 in 2013.

state only that the local authorities turned the men over to the criminal-justice system for punishment.[77]

In addition to machinations ensuring the farm's apparent success, the investigation revealed an accounting fraud related to corn. The farm's management falsified meat- and milk-production figures, but also inflated data on the corn harvest. Official records indicated the collective farm had planted 916 hectares and grown just over 40 metric tons of silage per hectare, a high average. In reality, it had planted barely one-third of that total, 310 hectares, and achieved only 37.9 tons per hectare.[78] The ruse performed a role in the larger fraud: if the farm had not reported a harvest of fodder sufficient to feed the large herd it purportedly possessed, the figures for the farm's livestock would have appeared more suspicious. Both the feed and the cows it was to feed existed only on paper. Documents attesting to nonexistent corn harvested lent credibility to the façade of high productivity the farm had constructed for itself, while concurrently complying with Khrushchev's known preference for corn.

Shelest and the oblast committee had to censure the Red Plowman collective farm's leaders, Kabanets and Miroshnichenko, a necessity he later judged "difficult." He wrote, "They were condemned because they, according to the Riazanites' example, purchased livestock for producing meat. And now we hold them responsible? But for what?"[79] On March 24, 1961, the bureau of the Ukrainian Central Committee handed down reprimands—rather than dismissals—to district party secretaries in the oblast, including those of Obukhov district. The dealings that landed Kabanets and the Red Plowman collective farm in trouble were common within Kyiv oblast, and in many oblasts across the USSR.[80]

In his analysis of Khrushchev's agricultural reforms, historian Anatolii Strelianyi argues

---

[77] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, l. 43.

[78] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, l. 43.

[79] Shelest, *Da ne sudimye budete*, 145.

[80] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, l. 43.

that only in 1961, after Larionov was exposed, did local officials begin to understand. They had created showpieces rather than organizing real production, exacerbating underlying problems of underinvestment and low productivity on all but the best farms. They had provided Khrushchev "big promises and individual examples of well-managed affairs," while concurrently allowing business-as-usual to continue elsewhere, out of the spotlight. Strelianyi suggests that they thought it was only "a kind of propaganda show, intended in part for domestic consumption, but basically designed for the West." For his part, Khrushchev demanded real production because he believed in the rightness of his cause—industrial agriculture and corn. "This was no show," Strelianyi concludes, "but actual work; not a game of 'catching up to and overtaking America,' but a real effort to do so."[81] When Khrushchev became aware of local leaders' deception, he expected the regions over which they lorded to make good the difference between the output they claimed and what they actually produced, a task state and collective farms could not achieve because of the recent campaigns. Khlevniuk explains that these scandals encouraged Khrushchev to break the regional networks headed by dictatorial leaders in the mold of Larionov and, within two years, to announce his scheme to divide party committees into agricultural and industrial branches.[82] Alienating many of supporters, Khrushchev removed the dictators, paving the way for the leaders who became the norm under Brezhnev.[83]

* * *

A champion of industrial farming, Khrushchev overturned longstanding land-management practices and crop structures in most corners of the USSR. His convictions on the issue solidified while he was Stalin's deputy in Ukraine, where he struggled against Moscow's efforts to impose a one-size-fits-all policy, but he found further inspiration in the US and

[81] Strelianyi, "Khrushchev and the Countryside," 122.

[82] Khlevniuk, "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR," 47–48.

[83] For more, see: Gorlizki, "Too Much Trust," 678.

Canada. The grassfield system of crop rotations, or *travopol'e*, had become Stalinist dogma even before its founder's death in 1939, and it remained the basis for land management after 1953. As early as February 1954, Khrushchev subjected it to criticism, making his case for corn at a conference of state-farm workers by reviling Rostov, Kursk, Krasnodar, and Stavropol for growing too little of the crop. He lamented that, whereas farmers in the US planted corn on over 30 percent of their cropland, in the USSR that figure was merely 3.6 percent. A voice from the audience offered an explanation: "They are afraid of row crops!" These required weeding between the rows, and therefore more labor. In reply, Khrushchev noted several farms where corn provided the largest harvest of livestock feed, while local authorities favored other crops because they required less labor. He charged that these state farms used their lands "incorrectly." "Why do we run things so poorly?" he asked. "Because the people who run these farms have lost their sense of responsibility for their assignments. There is no communist left within such people." He angrily continued, "We must steadfastly wage war against this evil, comrades." Invoking a trope from Stalinist rhetoric, he concluded, "We must unmask such people."[84]

Repeating this criticism at the Central Committee plenum in January 1955, Khrushchev attacked A. I. Kozlov, minister of state farms and an ally of G. M. Malenkov. Previously under fire for his ministry's policies, Kozlov mounted the podium to give an anodyne speech outlining the results of 1954 and plans for 1955, but Presidium members pounced. Bulganin charged, "Your policy actually contradicts the party line. At the last plenum, they warned you about your work methods—clerical-bureaucratic work methods."[85] Khrushchev and L. M. Kaganovich joined in, upbraiding Kozlov for breaking rules on land usage, and for failing to ensure that his ministry's farms planted corn. They attacked Kozlov because he supported Malenkov, who was demoted at this plenum. Furthermore, they renewed their attack on him for earlier mistakes,

---

[84] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1: 165.

[85] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 121, l. 98.

dating from before 1953, when Kozlov headed the Central Committee's Agricultural Department. That post gave him responsibility for forcing farms to use the grassfield system that, with the support of T. D. Lysenko, had been dogma. Khrushchev fulminated about Kozlov's responsibility "as former department head, who determined agricultural policy and was primarily guilty for the current chaos." "You are like a goose that pops out [of the water], flaps its wings, and goes along its way, clean and dry," he continued, suggesting that Kozlov would not get off so easily.[86] Attacks such as these served only to silence open criticism of Khrushchev's antigrass, pro-corn policies.[87]

Khrushchev portrayed the grassfield system as antithetical to modern, progressive—industrial—farming. He made an epithet of the term "grassfielders" [*travopol'shchiki*] for its advocates. He could not make the system or the grasses disappear quickly. By 1960, Khrushchev had spent years promoting corn, but grasses and fallow remained. He acknowledged shortages of planters, cultivators, and harvesters for row crops; however, as Strelianyi argues, Khrushchev considered "peasant conservatism" and officials who applied the grassfield system as a rigid doctrine as the brakes on progress. He therefore renewed his attempt to overturn the grassfield system and replace it with one based on synthetic fertilizers, machine power, herbicides, and pesticides, even though many of those were in short supply. "[Oblast] party leaders undertook to destroy the grasses," Strelianyi concludes, "just as zealously as they undertook to do anything recommended by Moscow that did not demand a lot of work and that could be accomplished by decree and crude pressure."[88]

Many leaders followed these orders, but when considered as part of practice the scene becomes more complicated. The antigrass campaign peaked in late 1961, after a Central Committee plenum where Khrushchev advocated again for destroying pastures and replacing

---

[86] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 121, ll. 109–11.

[87] Strelianyi, "Khrushchev and the Countryside," 121.

[88] Ibid., 124.

them with corn, sugar beet, sunflowers, and other row crops—likely as a way to make up for the shortfall created by the recent widespread frauds. Khrushchev vigorously denounced those he named grassfielders; in Moscow in December he railed against officials who "rob the collective and state farms of the ability to rationally utilize the land's abundance." At their insistence, farms planted not high-yielding corn and other crops suitable to industrial agriculture, but low-yielding "grasses." He indignantly pointed out that, of the 220 million hectares of arable land, some 29 percent grew grasses, hay, oats, or—worst of all—remained fallow, idle while the nutrients reaccumulated in the soil, a practice that industrial farming rejected in favor of applying synthetic fertilizer.[89] To realize Khrushchev's dream of catching up with America, Soviet farms had to learn from the capitalists themselves. Having quoted Lenin to that effect, Khrushchev offered an anecdote from Russia's history:

> We must learn and implement every useful thing, as Peter the Great did after the Swedes defeated him at Narva [in 1700]. He responded, 'Thank you for the lesson!' and set about learning how to make war. He mastered it, and defeated them at Poltava [in 1709]. He handed them such a defeat that afterward the Swedes never again tried any military campaigns.[90]

Khrushchev's message is clear: the capitalists had bested the USSR in farming technology in the postwar period and now it was time to master those industrial methods, in particular by replacing grasses with intensive methods for raising corn.

Khrushchev attacked the leaders of republics, oblasts, krais, districts, and even of individual farms for insufficient zeal in pursuing his offensive against pastures. Thus he chided A. A. Nikonov for "not loving corn" and publically shamed I. E. Kalnberzin. His admonishments of L. I. Maksimov, director of the "Kuban" state farm in Krasnodar krai, illustrated Khrushchev's simultaneous reliance on American examples, and his passion for the goals of "overtaking and surpassing America" and achieving the abundance needed to bring about communism.

---

[89] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 6: 216–17. For the broader context, see Taubman's account of this period. Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 517–18.

[90] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 6: 221.

Imperious and crude, he browbeat officials who failed to meet his expectations or to show enthusiasm for corn. Although exemplary for its large harvests of staples such as wheat, Maksimov's farm did not utilize the potential Khrushchev saw in corn. A few days before, a newspaper article called attention to Maksimov's failure to instantly adapt to Khrushchev's demands to reject the grassfield management system for intensive corn cultivation. The farm devoted only 16 percent of its plowland to corn and, of that, made only 1.6 percent of that crop into silage for use as livestock feed. By contrast, the farm devoted 29.4 percent of its land to hayfields.[91]

Khrushchev fixated on such seemingly mundane technical details because he considered them vital components of his agricultural reforms and, by extension, of the Soviet mission to compete with capitalism and construct communism. In early November, he condemned Maksimov's management: "Comrade Maksimov, you know agriculture well, but if you were a farmer in America . . . could you compete with Garst? What would your production cost on the market? Garst would trample you. He does not plant grasses; he plants corn." Khrushchev demanded to know how the unfortunate state farm director expected to efficiently produce inexpensive milk and meat without fully devoting his efforts to the most productive fodder crop, corn.[92] The leader invoked Garst as a source of legitimacy for his claims that only corn offered to permit the USSR to equal American abundance. "In peaceful competition with capitalism, the victory of communism is not in doubt," he explained. "But our country can and must solve problems of historical significance: to overtake and then surpass the USA, the most developed capitalist country, in per capita output of food." Describing how Soviet farms would do this, he highlighted Maksimov's failures. "We possess colossal potential, but we must more quickly and fully utilize it, bringing all reserves into action. We cannot allow things to progress at their own speed. We are demonstrating before all the world the socialist economy's attributes; the criteria

[91] "Tak li nado ispol'zovat' kubanskii chernozem?" *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (October 13, 1961): 2.

[92] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 6:60–61.

that will decide which system is better are the people's material and spiritual rewards." This was the decisive benchmark, and corn's role in meeting it could not have been clearer: "If we speak of developing livestock raising, then the most important element of this task is feed."[93] His ferocity notwithstanding, Khrushchev also proved capable of magnanimity: in 1963, he dispatched a letter in which he praised Maksimov for having learned his lesson and turned around the farm's operations—by planting more corn.[94]

During the antigrass campaign, party authorities resolved even technical disputes in favor of those who could invoke Khrushchev's policy preferences. Each oblast, krai, district, and farm had to develop "scientifically grounded" plans for crop rotations: that is, a scheme to eliminate pastures and plant corn. In February 1961, a journal on agriculture in the North Caucasus published an article by a researcher at the Stavropol krai agricultural research institute, V. K. Moroz. Describing a plan he developed for the krai's "October" collective farm, the expert argued for the "economic effectiveness" of using grassfield rotations to ensure sustainable production at low cost despite the low rainfall of the area. Claiming the mantle of Central Committee directives requiring efficient and inexpensive production, Moroz used the word "grassfield," a transgression sufficient to guarantee his defeat.[95]

Even though Moroz proposed only methods derived from similar principles rather than the entire grassfield system the chief economist of the krai agricultural department, a Comrade Chachin, denounced Moroz and his findings in a letter to F. D. Kulakov, secretary of the krai party committee. Chachin noted that the Moroz's scheme earmarked as little as one-twelfth of the collective farm's fields for corn, cutting the area from the 1960 total of 4,600 hectares, or 23 percent of cropland. In place of corn, the plan called for more perennial hayfields, which

---

[93] Ibid., 6:69.

[94] Ibid., 8:103.

[95] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8487, l. 29. The file contains the full text of the article, which was published in February 1961 in *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Severnogo Kavkaza*.

Khrushchev had anathematized.[96]

Chachin and Moroz each had credentials and drew on data to support his argument, so politics decided between them. Denouncing Moroz's plan as a covert preservation of the grassfield system, Chachin won support for his request that party officials "ensure that directors of research institutes make production recommendations based on objective analysis of actual data, rather than the subjective, archaic proposals of certain scientists [i.e. V. R. Vil'iams]."[97] In his response, Moroz defended his proposed crop rotations and plowing methods as the only means to counteract the dry conditions, wind erosion, and soil salination threatening the farm.[98] He dismissed Chachin's argument that corn offered more feed, countering that output in a single year was secondary to preserving the soil.[99] Despite his argument on grounds of sustainability, Moroz could not prevail in a political struggle against the weight of Khrushchev's pronouncements.

Reporting to Kulakov on the conflict, a functionary in the krai party committee maintained that Chachin "was correct to disagree with the crop rotations of the 'October' collective farm." In fairness, Moroz had written the article in 1959, when his recommendations accorded with the party line. It had languished in the hands of the journal editor throughout 1960 while Moscow's policies changed. By acknowledging that his old pronouncements were no longer valid, Moroz escaped serious consequences. The party committee called both men in for a "conversation" and then let the matter drop.

The conflict resolved itself without lasting harm to Moroz, but the tenor of Chachin's attack illustrates the feverish atmosphere Khrushchev encouraged, in which any advocacy for pasture, hay, or other elements of the Vil'iams system brought swift reaction. Few local

---

[96] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8487, l. 27.

[97] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8487, l. 28.

[98] Salination is a concentration of salt in the soil that, if unchecked, cuts the productivity of farmland. It commonly results from irrigating otherwise dry agricultural land.

[99] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2 d. 8487, l. 32.

authorities could endeavor to resist Khrushchev's demands to eliminate those practices. Republics and oblasts responded promptly, either because their secretaries hoped to curry favor with superiors, or because they were too weak to dodge the orders. Khrushchev's zeal for replacing grasses with corn furthermore provides the most compelling evidence for the widely held contention that he took his corn crusade beyond reasonable boundaries: not coincidently, plantings of corn reached their largest extent in 1962. In the case of Stavropol krai, the effect was clear: party and agriculture officials enthusiastically ordered pastures plowed and corn planted. At the beginning 1961, the krai's farms boasted more than 450,000 hectares of perennial grasses. By the fall of that year, they had plowed up 123,500 of them, or 27 percent. According to the plan, only 75,000 hectares would remain by the end of 1963.[100] Officials planned to cut the proportion from about 12 to less than 2 percent of cropland. In March 1963, officials spoke of having "disavowed the grassfield system," although they acknowledged that in practice that process remained incomplete.[101]

The movement in Stavropol krai to replace pastures with corn corroborates Strelianyi's finding that many zealously carried out Khrushchev's demands. Most regions across the USSR followed a similar path. The next section turns to Lithuania, a specific case in which the republic's Communist Party and government dodged those orders, preserving the cultivated pastures that had long been the foundation of agricultural land use.

* * *

In Lithuania, the party and government responded to Khrushchev's corn campaign in ways that illustrate a center-periphery relationship mediated by nationalism. Drawing on documents from the party archive in Vilnius, I show that officials cooperated to avoid following Moscow's orders. With a history of independence between the wars, Lithuania differed from

[100] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8597, l. 189.

[101] For example, see: GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 307, l. 22 and l. 74.

most other regions because solidarity based on nationalism helped local leaders to achieve their subterfuge.[102]Nationalism influenced the whole history of Soviet rule in the republic, beginning with its establishment. As they drove the German forces westward in 1944, Soviet forces repeated police and military actions they had originally used in 1940 to establish Soviet power there and in neighboring Latvia and Estonia, sparking anti-Soviet partisan resistance that persisted until 1950. After Stalin died in 1953, L. P. Beria moved quickly to reduce repression in the USSR's western regions in hopes of improving stability.[103]In the post-Stalin era, mutual trust among officials developed during the exceptionally long tenure of Antanas Sniečkus, who led the republic's party in 1940 and again from 1944 to his death in 1974. Headed by an authoritative secretary who avoided dictating to subordinates, the republic's party organization proved stable, exemplifying the "norm-bound" type of network. Formal procedures balanced with informal relationships, all of which helped protect local initiatives from what leaders considered Moscow's meddling.

Beria's action opened the way for suppressed national sentiment of each republic's titular nationality to reemerge, promoted by cadres drawn from among the local people.[104] Historian Elena Zubkova has concluded that the party organization in Lithuania differed from those of its Baltic neighbors due to Sniečkus's longevity and the stability this provided.[105] Postwar policies recreated the practice of *korenizatsiia*, an initiative characteristic of the 1920s, when Soviet authorities favored cadres belonging to local cultural and linguistic groups.[106] This

---

[102] For more on the effect nationalism had on shaping the republic's politics, giving them a different tenor from regions in the RSFSR, see: Saulius Grybkauskas, "The Role of the Second Party Secretary in the 'Election' of the First: The Political Mechanism for the Appointment of the Head of Soviet Lithuania in 1974," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, no. 2 (2013): 344.

[103] Weiner, "Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution," 216–21.

[104] E. Iu. Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml', 1940–1953 gg*. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008), 322.

[105] Ibid., 259. On the broader subject of national cadres, see chapter 5 of Zubkova's monograph. Ibid., 257-319.

[106] Zubkova specifically employs this term. Ibid., 322. Recently, historians have investigated Soviet nationalities policies in the interwar period, finding that Stalin moved in the 1930s to replace the

program required that the national culture have socialist content acceptable to Soviet authorities. Beria's moves signaled an initiative to promote Lithuanian leaders, rather than import Russian ones, strengthening the republic's party and government organization after 1953. The republic's leaders nonetheless had to toe the line that Moscow drew between permissible local interests and deviations termed "bourgeois nationalism."[107] The line shifted with time, and local leaders constantly had to ensure they did not overstep it. Khrushchev largely neglected the issue of national sentiment in the union republics, an attitude that historian Jeremy Smith argues changed only episodically, when a scandal called attention to an individual republic.[108]

Historians of the Soviet Union have found that nationality is not an essential and stable category, but instead is created and maintained via historical processes.[109] Sociologist Diana Mincyte shows that Lithuanian peasants responded to postwar collectivization not only with subtle forms of resistance, the "weapons of the weak" as James Scott terms them, but also by asserting themselves through relations with the land.[110] An anthropologist, Mincyte explores how collective farmers organized their private plots, revealing the interconnection among land, labor, and community. She argues that their practices, which allowed them to use power in these circumscribed spheres to offset their subordinate status, "testify to the limits of Soviet power

---

constructivist notions of nationality associated with *korenizatsiia*. He substituted pro-Russian policies and essentialist understandings of national identity. For more, see: Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Terry D. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[107] Zubkova, *Pribaltika i Kreml'*, 285.

[108] Jeremy Smith, "Leadership and Nationalism in the Soviet Republics, 1951–1959," in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953–1964*, ed. Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilič. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 73. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 79–93.

[109] For an overview, see: Ronald G. Suny and Terry D. Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[110] Diana Mincyte, "Everyday Environmentalism: The Practice, Politics, and Nature of Subsidiary Farming in Stalin's Lithuania," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (2009): 32.

and the contradictory experiences of Soviet citizenship."[111] In light of this connection between land use and national identity, Lithuanian political leaders responded to Moscow's orders to change the ways collective farms used the land. However tenuous the republic bosses' connection to peasants' actual ways of living and working, authorities adapted to and avoided dictates from above, suggesting that control over land use helped fortify their credentials as national leaders.

In a practical sense, the republic party apparatus guarded its prerogatives to control the economy, political appointments, and other aspects of governing the republic. This meant resisting the interference of central authorities in Moscow. The contest over the grassfield system and corn cultivation demonstrates that Moscow determined formal policy, but that did not guarantee that subordinates would carry it out, especially when a party network unified by identification with a titular nationality dug in its heals against a directive.

Sniečkus and the Lithuanian Communist Party responded to Khrushchev's demand that each republic plant more corn with footdragging not unlike that in neighboring Latvia. In 1954, Khrushchev had agitated for modest growth in corn plantings; Lithuanian farms had received enough seed to plant 10,000 hectares, a tiny percentage of their cropland. They planted only 4,000 hectares, and fed the remainder of the seed to livestock.[112] Unknown in Lithuania to that point, corn had to earn its place. At the Central Committee plenum in Moscow in January 1955, Sniečkus acknowledged that party leaders "had yet to overcome the stubbornness of certain collective farm managers, agricultural specialists, as well as party and government officials who consider it impossible to cultivate corn in the republic." He pledged the republic to planting

---

[111] Ibid., 34.

[112] LYA, f. 1771, op. 149, d. 302, l. 30. The archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania, the Special Archive's four-tiered system mirrors that of archives in Russia. Lithuanian-language scholarship uses the following terms *fondo* (*fond*, collection), *apyraso* (*opis'*, inventory), *bylos* (*delo*, file), and *lapas* (*list*, page). The finding aides and most of the documents, however, are in Russian, so I will hereafter use Russian-language terms when citing archival material.

40,000 hectares, ten times more than in 1954.[113] On February 18, 1955, party leaders gathered in Vilnius to endorse the January plenum's resolutions, and to ensure that district officials understood the new campaign for corn. Adopting the crop was one of many measures required to augment the output of meat and of the dairy products for which the republic was known. Highlighting corn's potential, Sniečkus acknowledged that Lithuanian farms underappreciated the crop. He said, "It should be an important part" of the solution to feed shortages, and the party deserved blame for not promoting it in the past.[114]

Enacted in early 1955, reforms in agricultural planning tasked the republic's Communist Party, Council of Ministers, and Ministry of Agriculture with designing a five-year plan for dairy and meat production. Each territorial unit across the USSR formulated a document, "Measures for increasing output of grain and of livestock raising," which outlined targets for 1960 and promised to meet them two, three, or even four years sooner.[115] Cautiously describing only "significant expansion of corn and feed crops, as well as boosting their yields," the Lithuanian plan did not define exact proportions of cropland to be devoted to each crop. It noted only that the sum of hay, pastures, corn, and related crops would expand from 399,000 hectares in 1954 to 853,000 hectares in 1960.[116]

For the first year of Khrushchev's corn crusade, district leaders reported dismal results to Vilnius. On April 25, 1955, even before spring planting, the republic's premier lamented the lax attitude of the Ministry of Agriculture toward the farms themselves. The republic's MTSs had ordered 100 corn planters, but received only 40. The 66 planters on hand capable of planting corn were enough for only 3,300 hectares, or 2.3 percent of the plan; this figure indicates that the plan had doubled since February to a total of approximately 80,000 hectares. Farms had yet

---

[113] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 124, l. 12.

[114] LYA, f. 1771, op. 149, d. 302, l. 30.

[115] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 1, d. 8105, l. 3.

[116] RGAE, f. 7486, op. 1, d. 8105, l. 10.

to designate fields, to apply fertilizer to them, or to collect the seeds from government distribution points.[117] The situation had not improved by the end of July, when inspectors reported "unsatisfactory progress." "The inspection demonstrated," their evaluation reads, "that the directors and agricultural specialists . . . have not ensured that corn was planted correctly . . . and have failed to organize timely cultivation." For instance, managers had assigned laborers to weed only 56.9 percent of corn plantings; in some districts, that figure was as low as 18 percent.[118] Inspectors deemed that farms used the available machinery poorly, a problem compounded by their managers' "continued underappreciation" of the crop and "most cautious" commitment to it. Many of them claimed that the spring's cool weather had caused corn to grow slowly, a problem that such organizational delays only worsened. One collective farm, for example, reported that 174 farmers were weeding corn, but only 10 actually turned up in the fields.[119] Lithuanian farms differed little from those of other oblasts and republics to which Khrushchev hoped to spread corn in 1955. Moreover, the situation changed only a little by the end of the 1950s, as the republic achieved few of Moscow's corngrowing objectives.

In the early 1960s, Lithuania became exceptional only in responding to Khrushchev's campaign against hay and pastures. He demanded that the Baltic republics replace their longstanding crop rotations based on pastures with row crops grown using industrial farming methods. Nonetheless, the state supplied few of the seeds, machines, and chemicals necessary to grow large crops of corn. Additionally, Lithuania's cool, humid climate suited corn poorly. Most experts favored a system of managed pastures, a local adaptation of the grassfield system Khrushchev condemned. The legumes and grasses of these crop rotations replenished the soil, and required little labor and few inputs, such as synthetic fertilizers. Moscow's order to supplant that system with corn emboldened the republic's party organization and government to quietly

[117] LYA, f. 1771, op. 161, d. 13, l. 46.

[118] LYA, f. 1771, op. 161, d. 13, ll. 70–71.

[119] LYA, f. 1771, op. 161, d. 13, ll. 73–74.

subvert it.

A scandal erupted in November 1961, shedding light on the processes at work in the republic and in the Soviet Union. A group of Lithuanian agronomists and scientists working at the republic's Institute for Land Management attacked Khrushchev's antigrass dogma. P. Vasinauskas, director of the institute, and a group of colleagues signed a letter advocating their solution for meeting Lithuania's demands for livestock feed. They rejected making V. R. Vil'iams's grassfield system dogma, as it had been under Stalin, a position that did not contradict Khrushchev's pronouncements. Instead of row crops such as corn, however, they supported managed pastures, which they believed suited the land and climate of Lithuania, where temperatures were cool and annual rainfall abundant.[120] The republic's Russian-language newspaper, *Sovetskaia Litva*, (Soviet Lithuania), published their views, which backed plantings of clover and other legumes that return nitrogen to the soil. [121] This was antithetical to Khrushchev's industrial farming principles, which used synthetic fertilizers to achieve the same result in less time.

Khrushchev had created an antigrass fever that forced the bureau of the republic's Central Committee to condemn the letter as "politically harmful." On December 22, 1961, it resolved that the specialists' views "contradicted the party line on the grassfield system of land management, . . . leaving the grassfield system in place and opposing the fodder crops such as corn, sugar beet, and other row crops." The Central Committee formally reprimanded Vasinauskas, as well as his superior, the minister of agriculture, who failed to denounce the letter and prevent its spread. Finally, the Central Committee threatened both the institute

[120] LYA, f. 1771, op. 207, d. 138, ll. 173–200. I have cited a Russian translation of the text in the Lithuanian Central Committee's files. The original Lithuanian text is dated November 14, 1961, and can be found in the same file: LYA, f. 1771, op. 207, d. 138, ll. 150–72.

[121] P. Vasinauskas, et al., "My protiv neplodorodnykh khleverishch," *Sovetskaia Litva* (November 12, 1961 1.

director and the minister with strict punishment in the event of similar failures in the future.[122] Even before the resolution passed, the tenor of *Sovetskaia Litva* changed, as it denounced the scientists and asserted that corn was superior. The newspaper did not publish the Central Committee resolution, but on the same day, an article argued for land-management reform, signaling the issue's significance. It described several collective farms in the Ignalina district that resisted replacing grasses with corn and other row crops, in opposition to party directives.[123]

Dissatisfied with the Lithuanian Central Committee's moves, Khrushchev attacked the leaders of Lithuania for lacking faith in corn and in modern industrial farming. Having somehow learned of the letter, he denounced it, and the "grassfielders" who wrote it, in the presence of Sniečkus and other Lithuanian leaders. In a speech in Minsk on January 12, 1962, he seized on an excerpt from the letter arguing that cattle had evolved a complex biological system to digest grasses, which offered the logical solution to the feed shortage, rather than grain, beets, or other feeds. "Why do the Lithuanian researchers call on the collective farmers to continue using old-fashioned methods?" Khrushchev questioned. His answer was that they had insufficient faith in corn.[124] He insisted that corn was also vital for farms in Belarus, where he was speaking, as well as in neighboring regions of Ukraine. Growing agitated, he resorted to ridicule: "Some might say: 'What's this, Khrushchev has come just to rip us apart, to criticize us?'" He then asked sarcastically, "Did you think that I came to read you some of Pushkin's poems?" Instead, he considered it his job to call attention to failures, forcing officials and organizations to reform flawed ways steeped in the dogma of the grassfield system. He taunted, "You can read poems on your own."[125]

---

[122] LYA, f. 1771, op. 207, d. 137, l. 6.

[123] I. Raudeliunas, "Zemle nuzhny zabotlivye ruki," *Sovetskaia Litva* (December 22, 1961): 2–3.

[124] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 6:322.

[125] Ibid., 6:328.

Throughout early 1962, the Khrushchev's rebuke colored Lithuanian officials' actions and the content of the republic's newspapers. *Sovetskaia Litva* often ran articles encouraging managers to reject the old crop rotations and accept row crops.[126] In a front-page article, district party secretary A. Davidonis declared, "The grassfield system . . . has harmed the agriculture of our republic. N. S. Khrushchev very justly criticized Comrade Vasinauskas" and the others for alleged support for that system.[127] Republic authorities held a series of conferences for district leaders to detail the case for corn. "At the recent conference of Belorussian agricultural workers [that is, in Minsk]," Sniečkus reported dispassionately to one of them, "shortcomings in the leadership of collective and state farms were revealed."[128]

In February and March, Sniečkus censured district leaders for "failure to restructure crop rotations and, especially, for adopting high-yielding row crops—corn and sugar beets."[129] Khrushchev's attack on the Lithuanians for loyalty to the grassfield system continued to mount. On March 7, 1962, he again castigated them in an address to the Central Committee plenum. This forced Sniečkus to acknowledge the apparent accuracy of Khrushchev's critique, concluding that Khrushchev's criticism of the ideas in the letter "aided in a thorough understanding of the grassfield system's fallacious nature. . . . [It helped] our specialists grasp their mistakes."[130] At a Lithuanian Central Committee plenum in late March, Sniečkus condemned the agricultural bureaucracy for continuing the "extensive grassfield system."[131] He also noted Khrushchev's

---

[126] For some of the many examples, see: V. Figurinas, "Bez travopol'ia, za vysokii urozhai," *Sovetskaia Litva* (January 17, 1962); B. Melamed, "Reshitel'no perekhodit' na propashnuiu sistemu," *Sovetskaia Litva* (January 20, 1962); and P. Vilaishis, "Nashi plany i dela," *Sovetskaia Litva* (March 28, 1962): 2.

[127] A. Davidonis, "S travopol'shchikami ne po puti," *Sovetskaia Litva* (January 18, 1962): 1.

[128] "Kurs—na propashnuiu sistemu zemledeliia: S mezhraionnogo soveshchaniia rabotnikov sel'skogo khoziaistva v Kaunas," *Sovetskaia Litva* (January 25, 1962): 2.

[129] LYA, f. 1771, op. 220, d. 20, l. 20.

[130] "Rech' tovarishcha A. Iu. Sniechkusa," *Sovetskaia Litva* (March 8, 1962): 2.

[131] LYA, f. 1771, op. 218, d. 8, ll. 2–3.

tirade in Minsk in January, calling the criticism "just and deserved."[132] Sniečkus concluded by calling on farms to reduce their pasturelands by approximately 20 percent in 1962 alone, planting corn in their place.[133] Yet another plenum in July resulted in a report to Moscow highlighting a pledge to increase the republic's corn plantings by 61,000 hectares, or 51 percent. Sniečkus had described how the republic's leaders "had drawn practical conclusions" from Khrushchev's censure, embarking on a program to "reexamine crop structures" and "alter them toward fuller and more rational land use by expanding plantings of row crops."[134]

Authorities connected the dispute over land management with larger fears about nationalism and loyalty to the Soviet Union. In March, Sniečkus had underscored concerns manifestations of impermissible nationalist sentiments in agricultural training colleges. Like the republic's land-management institute, these schools came under fire for disseminating dogmatic interpretations of agricultural science—coded language meaning Vil'iams's grassfield system—and for the low level of their students' knowledge about corn. Officials in the Lithuanian Central Committee also felt uneasy over students' lack of enthusiasm for "scientific atheism" and "historical materialism" courses, part of their general education curriculum. Moreover, they saw nonconformist tendencies in the alarmingly low attendance in Russian-language lessons and classes on the history of the Communist Party.[135]

Khrushchev's authority *seemingly* compelled the Lithuanian party and its leaders to carry out Moscow's policy, furthering his crusade for corn and bringing industrial farming to Soviet farms. These precluded the Lithuanian researchers' conservative, albeit agronomically sustainable, approaches. Yet evidence points to the conclusion that there is more to this history than the professed success of Khrushchev's efforts to change land management. Given the

---

[132] LYA, f. 1771, op. 218, d. 8, l. 24.

[133] LYA, f. 1771, op. 218, d. 8, l. 21.

[134] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 197, l. 133.

[135] LYA, f. 1771, op. 220, d. 20, ll. 138–39.

secretive nature of the actions involved, the following is a circumstantial account of how Lithuanian officials evaded Moscow's demands, a strategy that enjoyed the support of the republic's highest officials, including Antanas Sniečkus. A speech he made shortly after Khrushchev's ouster in October 1964 contains the most compelling evidence for this finding. After speaking at a gathering of republic party officials about the plenum that ratified Khrushchev's forced retirement, Sniečkus spoke more frankly to the republic's Committee for State Security (KGB). Significantly, the text of this speech is located not in the collections of the republic's Central Committee, but in Sniečkus's personal files. In the triumphant tone characteristic of the days following Khrushchev's ouster, Sniečkus first recounted the events of the October plenum. "For months, even years, there has not been confidence in tomorrow," Sniečkus recalled, blaming "all of the reorganizations." These made it impossible to avoid feeling "constrained." Khrushchev even "terrorized" high-ranking officials for perceived mistakes by pinning on them "labels and nicknames." He had created the appearance of "democratic methods of leadership, when this was actually only the external side, while a true dictatorship existed within the Presidium" reinforcing his "boundless authority."[136] Sniečkus acknowledged that the USSR had achieved some progress under Khrushchev, but only in those areas where the First Secretary had not "violated Leninist methods of leadership," as he had with growing frequency in the 1960s.[137] Naturally, Sniečkus applauded Khrushchev's defeat of "the antiparty group" in June 1957, which had brought to power those who now had ousted Khrushchev.

Above all, Sniečkus underlined the crisis in agriculture by repeating the charge, made at the October plenum, that nothing had improved since 1958. He boasted that in Lithuania the outcome had been different: in fact, output was higher than before. Holding Khrushchev responsible for the Riazan affair and the ecological challenges of the Virgin Lands campaign in Kazakhstan, Sniečkus added the campaign against grasses ongoing since 1961. Khrushchev

[136] LYA, f. 16895, op. 2, d. 92, ll. 4–5.

[137] LYA, f. 16895, op. 2, d. 92, l. 8.

forced unnecessary change across the USSR, pressuring party officials to eliminate grasses wholesale by plowing up even productive fields. Sniečkus reminded his audience of the incident when the Lithuanian agricultural researchers' letter had elicited a fierce rebuttal by the First Secretary, and how he had transformed the grasses from a technical into a political issue by viewing support for them as a challenge to his personal power and authority.[138]

Faced with demands to destroy the pastures so long a part of the region's agriculture, Sniečkus and the republic's party leaders responded with dissimulation and delay. Other regions had bowed to "enormous pressure" from above, but not Lithuania. Sniečkus recalled how the republic's leaders had meekly accepted the denunciations from Moscow, pledging each spring to plow up pastures in the fall and each fall to do it in the spring. "In truth, we sabotaged this business," Sniečkus revealed to his audience. "We believed in the practitioners and specialists in our republic, but not in Khrushchev."[139] He continued, "During these years when they pressured us, we reduced our area of perennial grasses by 3 percent, but that was only old clover and the like. We held out." He then described how they ameliorated the pressure placed on them by Moscow. "You speak with the chairman of the collective farms: you'll learn that we sent them directives [to plow up pastures] and then we gathered meetings . . . in Dotnuva [site of the republic's agricultural institute] or some other place." The key was to do so away from Vilnius, because in the republic's capital they might be overheard "by all sorts of people."[140] Indeed, *Sovetskaia Litva* had reported on meetings convened at Dotnuva, where Sniečkus, the minister of agriculture, and other officials met with district leaders and collective farm personnel.[141] Sniečkus revealed, "There, without the stenographers, we told them, 'Comrades, we must do this and do that.' And people understood . . . They knew that it was truly necessary to do it that way;

---

[138] LYA, f. 16895, op. 2, d. 92, ll. 8–16.

[139] LYA, f. 16895, op. 2, d. 92, ll. 16–17.

[140] LYA, f. 16895, op. 2, d. 92, l. 20.

[141] See, for example: "S chest'iu vypolnim zadachi, postavlennye plenumom TsK KPSS: S mezhraionnogo soveshchaniia rabotnikov sel'skogo khoziaistva v Dotnuve," *Sovetskaia Litva* (February 4, 1961): 1.

. . . We did not sleep many nights because [authorities in Moscow] attacked us first from one side, then the other."[142] He thus implied that the formal measures and official reports served only to throw Moscow off the trail, while in private the republic's party leaders encouraged farms to carry out policies they considered correct, even though they contravened directives from Moscow. He claimed that, as a result, the republic's output remained high; in contrast to the falling milk output in regions where farms plowed up pastures and planted corn, in Lithuania it grew 24 percent even in 1964.[143]

Collective farms employed several strategies to circumvent orders to plow up pastures and plant corn. Some planted corn in a strip several rows deep along roads leading to and from the farm.[144] Any visitors hostile to the farm's mission to preserve pastures would see only that façade, while the hay, clover, or other traditional crops grew on the hidden remainder of the field. In a second strategy, farms planted the corn far from the road on the presumption that if it remained out of sight, inspectors could not accurately estimate the size of plantings, and therefore had to rely on easily falsified statistics. As second secretary of the Lithuanian Central Committee and the only Russian in the republic's top leadership, B. S. Sharkov was viewed as Moscow's representative in the republic, making it unlikely the others informed him of such plans.[145] In June 1961, Sharkov had denounced a district party committee because it "had not learned from the criticism" of superiors, as party discipline required, or dropped its stubborn resistance to changing crop rotations. "What have you learned from this?" he asked. "You said, 'We must plant the corn further from the road, so that it is not visible.'"[146] Similar accusations

---

[142] LYA, f. 16895, op. 2, d. 92, l. 20.

[143] LYA, f. 16895, op. 2, d. 92, l. 17.

[144] See: Vytautas Tininis, *Sniečkus: 33 metai valdžioje: Antano Sniečkus biografinė apybraiž*a (Vilnius: Antrasis papildytas pataisytas leidimas, 2000), 171. I am grateful to Saulius Grybkauskas both for pointing out the existence of the source and for providing an English translation.

[145] For more on the role of the second secretary as the instrument of Moscow's authority, see: Grybkauskas, "Role of the Second Party Secretary," 343–44.

[146] LYA, f. 1771, op. 207, d. 28, l. 394.

flew when farms rejected the square-cluster method for planting corn, a technically challenging practice that Khrushchev's policies required all regions to employ. According to Sharkov, the republic's agricultural institute advocated against the method. He sniped that they acted as if "crop science does not require geometry."[147]

Moreover, as early as December 1958, the republic's policy on grasses and, in particular, procuring seeds caused a stir. Speaking to a Central Committee plenum in Moscow, Sniečkus described his republic's efforts to meet Moscow's demands for more corn. He praised small successes and promised further improvement.[148] At the same plenum, he had to respond to V. E. Chernyshev, party secretary of neighboring Kaliningrad oblast of the RSFSR, who complained that farms in his oblast sold their grass seeds to neighbors in Lithuania, where prices were higher. Red clover sold to the state for only 20 rubles per kilogram in the RSFSR, while across the border in Lithuania the same seeds sold for 32 rubles. Chernyshev supposed that this was the result of "an abnormal situation, some sort of disturbance [*shumikha*]."[149] In response, Sniečkus presented the republic's five-year plan to raise output by committing to plant more clover, which constituted 25 percent of the republic's cropland in 1959, and doubled the 1953 total. Although it occurred before Khrushchev's feverish campaign against the grassfield system in 1961, the incident put Sniečkus on shaky ground. He said that higher prices were required to ensure a supply of seeds sufficient for the program. When challenged about the source of the extra seeds, Sniečkus replied coyly that they bought them "from friends," a response that, according to the stenographer's record, drew laughter from the audience. Furthermore, the file in Sniečkus's personal papers that contains his speech from October 1964 also contains a transcript of this exchange, suggesting a relationship between the two.[150]

---

[147] LYA, f. 1771, op. 207, d. 28, l. 395.

[148] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 347, l. 24.

[149] LYA, f. 16985, op. 2, d. 92, l. 77.

[150] LYA, f. 16985, op. 2, d. 92, ll. 78-79. The same passage can be found in: RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 347, l. 21.

N. G. Egorychev, then secretary of the Moscow city party committee, years later recounted a meeting with Sniečkus during a vacation on the Baltic Sea coast in August 1964, the period when party leaders were plotting to remove Khrushchev. The usual dinner, drinking, and "comradely socializing" that accompanied such meetings gave Egorychev an opening to start a conversation about Khrushchev and the cabal against hum. Sniečkus and the other Lithuanian leaders steadfastly avoided being drawn into it. Later, after Khrushchev's fall, Sniečkus called Egorychev to offer an apology, revealing that he had rejected the overture out of fear that it was a "provocation."[151] The Lithuanian party boss's anxiety seems especially understandable in the event that he had something, such as pervasive fraud in agriculture, to hide from Khrushchev's emissaries.

This scheming to protect pastures and reject corn required solidarity among the officials of the republic. A disgruntled party member could write to the authorities in Moscow, as those in Ukraine or other regions did at the height of the scandals following the Riazan affair. Gorlizki concludes that stability and trust established over a decade or more allowed Larionov to go further than most other regional leaders.[152] In Lithuania, built-up trust and a sense of belonging to the republic's titular nationality made this possible by discouraging officials from breaking ranks and writing to Moscow. In his speech to the KGB party committee in October 1964, Sniečkus illustrated how he maintained unity through personal relationships with local officials, frequently Lithuanians, with whom he had developed a rapport in his long years leading the republic. Sniečkus recounted how in a private meeting he dissuaded a collective farm chairman from writing a letter to Khrushchev to account for the republic's agricultural problems and plead the case for pastures. The man "was extraordinarily agitated," Sniečkus related, "but I told him, 'Whatever you write, the repercussions will fall on me,'" implying that such a letter would only draw Moscow's ire rather than solve the problem of its overbearing authority. Having agreed to

[151] "Khrushchevskie vremena," 293.

[152] Gorlizki, "Scandal in Riazan," 273–75.

wait patiently, the chairman admitted, "'We see how our republic leadership cushions many of Khrushchev's improper policies.'"[153] Sniečkus hoped to use this story to illustrate links between key party figures and those responsible for putting these back-room maneuvers into practice. The incident demonstrates the mechanism for and the importance of building trust in Sniečkčus's authority in the republic. Moreover, Sniečkus spoke about these tactics openly to subordinates. Because he did so after Khrushchev's removal, he faced no threat to his power for revealing the whole story, reflecting a sense of relief that the crisis had passed and the emergence of the post-Khrushchev' period's atmosphere of stability that gave local party organizations relative freedom to act in their own regions.

It is unlikely that other local party organizations carried out similar large-scale subterfuge, or that those schemes could work without the element of nationalism. The strong trust that Larionov had built up in Riazan was rare, as Gorlizki shows. As this Lithuanian case suggests, national identity set the republic apart, pushing local officials to present a united front against external authorities seeking to alter historical relations to the land and agricultural practices. Based on this evidence, nationalism facilitated efforts to construct and maintain a norm-bound, or compromise, network, one both efficient at achieving results and presenting a comparatively unified face to outsiders, the bearers of Moscow's authority.

According to the metaphor popularized by historian Yuri Slezkine, the USSR was a "communal apartment," in which each national republic was a different room connected through the main hall—the RSFSR—all combining into the larger Soviet Union.[154] To extend Slezkine's apt phrase, the walls of each room permitted its inhabitants to do as they pleased so long as they remained out of sight of the head of the apartment building's residential committee; that is, the central authorities in Moscow. In the Khrushchev period, Lithuania's party leaders

---

[153] LYA, f. 16895, op. 2, d. 92, l. 18.

[154] Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, op. 3 (1994): 414–52.

and rank-and-file members built solidarity against interference in economic policy. Historian Ronald G. Suny writes that the period between Stalin's death and the early 1970s was one of weakening control and increasing independence from Moscow. Republic leaders "forged their own ties with their populations through the manipulation of ethnic symbols." These allowed them leverage and leeway, "as long as economic growth continued and the worst excesses of nationalism were contained."[155] Once the deportations ended around 1950, a new Lithuanian-but-Soviet (or Soviet-but-Lithuanian) elite arose under the guidance of Lithuanian leaders, with Sniečkus at the top. Moscow-based authorities expressed concern that nationalism in republics should remain within acceptable boundaries. The environment gave republic leaders an element of independence, so long as the assertions of belonging to a nation remained either hidden or subsumed beneath an overarching Sovietness. National identities, which helped groups transcend the overarching Soviet framework during M. S. Gorbachev's *glasnost'* reforms, contributed to the union's dissolution. The rapid reemergence of nationalist movements into the open in response to Gorbachev's policies, with Lithuanians among the first and most passionate, suggests that they existed all along. Therefore, they had coexisted—although out of sight—during the Khrushchev era with senses of belonging acceptable to Moscow.

* * *

Khrushchev expended great effort to persuade subordinates to put industrial farming technologies to work in the fields under their control. Tirelessly promoting row crops and industrial methods for farming them, he worked to replace crops and land-management practices he dismissed as conservative and inadequate to the task of raising production to equal American benchmarks. He attacked local authorities who did not implement his policies or meet his expectations because they challenged his authority, but also because they were obstacles to

[155] Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 117.

his dreams of American-style abundance and constructing communism. During the first five years of his leadership (1953–58), Khrushchev backed strong regional leaders who promised to and seemed to carry out his policies. These "secretary-dictators" made his revolution in agriculture a reality, but in 1960 and 1961, the resulting scandals damaged Khrushchev's legitimacy. The Central Committee therefore moved to oust those regional secretaries it held responsible. Yet Khrushchev still demanded that regional party organizations move quickly and decisively to carry out the campaign of the given moment. In 1961 and 1962, this meant plowing up hayfields and disavowing the "grassfield" system, and replacing them with corn, sugar beets, and other row crops grown using industrial technologies.

The dialectical relationship between center and periphery becomes clearer through an examination of how each type of regional network Khlevniuk identified responded to the policies Moscow required them to implement. Khrushchev's overwhelming authority to determine policy could not guarantee that regional networks, with their own leaders, priorities, internal dynamics, and relationships with superiors in Moscow, made those policies a reality. In turn, Khrushchev had to respond. Center-periphery relationships proved one of the obstacles to the success of his corn crusade. Unwritten rules and informal administrative practices—sometimes even illicit ones—supported efforts to ensure outward compliance with Moscow's policies. This is not to suggest that the Red Plowman collective farm of Kyiv region, Lithuania, and the other examples in this chapter encompass all possible kinds of subterfuge. Furthermore, not every farm practiced fraud in reporting about corn and other crops, and not in every year. These episodes illustrate strategies available to leaders who had to secure themselves and their regions against Khrushchev's charges of failing to achieve miracles. His attempt to pursue this crusade extended to direct appeals to individuals and groups in his speeches, the subject of chapter 5. The Soviet press amplified the party line on the corn crusade, encouraging the farmworkers who grew corn and representing the crop as a source of abundance to those who would consume the meat and dairy products it provided.

CHAPTER 5

THE RHETORIC OF CORN: SELLING ABUNDANCE TO SOVIET CITIZENS

In his speeches, Nikita Khrushchev frequently extolled corn's virtues with much bombast. Taking its cue from him, the Soviet press routinely termed it "a miracle crop," or *chudesnitsa* in Russian, and "the queen of the fields." In other cases, Khrushchev observed, "The USA is mounted on a racehorse, which is corn, and we must catch them on that same racehorse."[1] On another occasion he declared, "Comrades, corn is a tank for use by soldiers, by which I mean collective farmers. It is a tank with the capability to overcome barriers . . . on the path of creating plenty for our people."[2] Elaborating on the examples of Khrushchev's exuberant rhetoric about corn, this chapter evaluates how the Soviet mass media encouraged urban and rural audiences alike to perceive corn as a means to expand supplies of meat, milk, and eggs, as well as new foods made from corn.

The second section of the chapter considers how the press spoke to farmworkers, pushing that targeted audience to regard corn harvests as their contribution to the mission to provide that plenty. Khrushchev's speeches exhorted workers to devote themselves to their work. The press called on farmworkers to emulate outstanding "vanguard workers," to help build the communist society that promised a better life, and to prepare themselves to build that higher stage of socioeconomic development. Instead of a survey of the press's output, this chapter considers representative examples highlighting appeals to these principles and, thereby, the ways in which the press conveyed messages through a long-established language of words,

---

[1] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 4:39.

[2] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 3:498.

symbols, images, and practices that Soviet authorities used in an attempt to shape the world.[3] I analyze the content of mass-circulation newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, as well as publications widely read but targeting a specific audience: for instance, the Ministry of Agriculture published *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (Agrciulture) for peasants, farm personnel, and local officials of agricultural districts. In 1961, its name changed to *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (*Rural Life*), but its audience and function remained consistent. I examine the content of *Kukuruza* (*Corn*), an "academic-technical" monthly dedicated to publicizing best practices for an audience of local officials, farm mangers, specialists, and other technical personnel. First published in 1955, after 1964 it became *Kukuruza i sorgo* (*Corn and Sorghum*).

Providing a sense of the volume of publications on the subject, a bibliography of materials about corn domestically published from the tsarist period to the end of 1959 lists more than 4,000 books, pamphlets, articles, and book chapters, the vast majority of which appeared between 1955 and 1959. The categories cover subjects ranging from basic cultivation methods to recommendations for specific regions of the country.[4] By another count, a further 1,075 books on the subject were published between 1960 and 1964.[5] The Soviet national bibliography listings of journal and newspaper articles present a similar picture of the volume of information about corn that flooded the Soviet press after 1955.[6] Notably, these publications cite only Russian-

---

[3] I have drawn the idea of "languages of power" from Donald J. Raleigh's history of the Civil War in Saratov. See: Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), especially chapter 2, "Languages of Power: How the Saratov Bolsheviks Imagined Their Enemies," 43–73. The foundational language of the Bolsheviks evolved from precedents in the prerevolutionary underground, but began to solidify in the crisis of the Civil War into "internal" and "external languages," linked by a common "ideological value system." This allowed Bolsheviks to "speak in two registers at once," using the latter language, that of newspapers, speeches, agitation materials, and the like, to motivate and mobilize the audience. Ibid., 44. I also have been influenced by Raleigh's judgment that language "has the capacity to transform human relationships and can help bring into existence that which it seeks to represent," but at the same time is also "referential" and "responsive" to the world. Ibid., 53.

[4] I. E. Emel'ianov, ed., *Kukuruza: Bibliograficheskii ukazatel' otechestvennoi literatury za 1794–1959 gg*. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva sel'skogo khoziaistva SSSR, 1961).

[5] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, l. 149.

[6] *Letopis' zhurnal'nykh statei* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznoi knizhnoi palaty, 1926–); and *Letopis'*

language items, but materials also were published in many other languages. In 1955, the initial burst of agitation for corn saw the production of more than 100 posters advocating for corn, their print runs ranging from a few thousand for locally produced examples to tens and even hundreds of thousands. The print runs of seven exceeded 100,000, and those of three topped 200,000: these seven alone totaled 1.125 million posters.[7] Additionally, Soviet Radio often broadcast similar messages.[8]

Drawing on the work of historian Thomas Wolfe, I analyze the content of mass-media depictions of the corn crusade to reveal how the Soviet press sought to reshape citizens' beliefs and actions. Finding that Thaw-era journalists enthusiastically pursued their mission, Wolfe considers the press a medium for practices of "governmentality," a concept first articulated by Michel Foucault. By drawing on the words of sociologist Mitchell Dean to interpret the concept, Wolfe suggests that it helps interpret attempts "to sculpt, mobilize, and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants, and lifestyles of individuals and groups." Swaying their targets "to make themselves into both subjects and objects of government," these practices aimed to influence conduct.[9] As Wolfe shows, journalists navigated the complexities of the Thaw-era currents in the Soviet system, fulfilling their assignment to help govern society not

---

gazetnykh statei (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznoi knizhnoi palaty, 1936–).

[7] *Letopis' izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia knizhnaia palata, 1944–1966).

[8] A survey of scripts in the files of the Soviet radio for 1955, for instance, finds that many of the semiweekly broadcasts on themes related to agriculture included information about corn. Examples include: "A conversation with the chief of the Department of Feed Crops of the USSR Minister of Agriculture, B. F. Solov'ev, 'Corn in every region!'" broadcast February 28, 1955, from 20:00 to 20:29. GARF, f. R-6903, op. 12, d. 296, ll. 370–71. Also: "Corn in the fields of Smolensk," broadcast March 12, 1955, from 6:45 to 6:59. GARF, f. R-6903, op. 12, d. 296, ll. 427–36. Content likely appeared on television, which was in its infancy. Much more common, especially in rural areas, were showings of short propaganda and documentary films.

[9] Thomas C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 13. Foucault and the theorists who followed him developed the concept by observing liberal societies of Western Europe. By revealing that "governmentality" helps explain practices used by the Communist Party to rule in a state-socialist society, Wolfe notes that his research strengthens the case for considering the USSR as part of common twentieth-century global industrial society. Ibid., 16–17.

directly, but by "acting upon others' actions."[10] In this specific case, the press encouraged Soviet citizens to view corn as a source of the material plenty Khrushchev promised, and to act by joining efforts to grow it.

* * *

The Soviet media broadcast Khrushchev's speeches about corn and repeated his message ad nauseam from 1955 until 1964, when the campaign abruptly ceased following his ouster. The leader and the press encouraged farmers to love their work because, although arduous, it promised to strengthen the Soviet Union and world peace, and provide abundance. In April and May 1955, when Khrushchev first preached his corn crusade, Soviet authorities gathered party members, workers, and other groups to collect signatures on a petition, "The World Peace Council's Declaration against Preparations for Nuclear War." A Soviet-backed organization, the council denounced the Cold War and represented the USSR to the world as the defender of nonaggression and disarmament in the face of capitalist powers' threats to peace. Hundreds of thousands of everyday citizens signed the document. As they did, they pledged to work more productively in order to fortify the USSR against perceived American aggression. Farmworkers in Stavropol krai, for instance, promised to grow record harvests of corn. "War is hateful," exclaimed the head of a brigade on a farm in the krai's Libknecht district. "I witnessed enormous destruction and saw numberless victims," he continued, evoking the German army's presence in the area in late 1942. "We will defend peace by working: fighting to implement the directives of the January Central Committee plenum, we pledge to raise a corn crop of 32 tons per hectare."[11] Across the USSR, workers producing steel, coal, sugar beets, and many other goods echoed this sentiment. A new priority after the January plenum, corn featured in the reports the party

[10] Ibid., 12-13. Wolfe argues that these efforts were not a crude bludgeon, but in fact an elegant system for shaping and directing the individual in a collectivist society. The press, therefore, "was the institution in Soviet society able to present a continuous reflection of the state of socialism and the achievements of a socialist society." Ibid., 2.

[11] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6396, ll. 107–8.

organizations of Balashov,[12] Briansk, and Vladimir oblasts dispatched to Moscow to document their efforts in support of both campaigns.[13] Although not subject to any direct sanction for refusing, attendees at such meetings responded to the expectation that they would make a pledge. These "socialist obligations" seem to have affected the average worker little because, whereas the "vanguard" workers always met theirs, everyone else quickly began to ignore them. Nonetheless, frequent campaigns of this kind appealed to patriotism, socialism, and—in this case—antiwar sentiment.

In this regard, pledges to grow corn exemplify "moral incentives," a term I borrow from historian O. M. Verbitskaia, who uses the Russian "*moral'noe pooshchrenie*" to describe rewards such as the "honorary certificates, medals, and orders" that farmworkers received in lieu of wages during and after World War II.[14] The authorities had appealed to patriotism and Orthodoxy to inspire farmworkers to grow crops needed to feed workers in the factories and soldiers at the front.[15] "Moral incentives" appealed to the socialist virtue of farmworkers, trained specialists, farm managers, and district officials, encouraging them to work diligently and grow corn. Official culture promoted these values throughout the period; in fact, they bring to mind the commandments enshrined in 1961 in Khrushchev's "Moral Codex of the Builders of Communism," which exhorted citizens—and young people in particular—to be honest; work conscientiously; and devote themselves to collectivism, communism, patriotism, and related principles.[16]

Communist Party and Soviet government directives promoting corn after the January

---

[12] Part of Saratov oblast for most of the USSR's existence, the town of Balashov served of the center of its own oblast between 1954 and 1957. Other constituent districts had joined it from Stalingrad (today's Volgograd), Voronezh, and Tambov oblasts.

[13] RGANI, f. 5, op. 16, d. 707, l. 39, l. 56, l. 59, and l. 77.

[14] Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 49.

[15] Chumachenko finds that this was far from the only justification for Stalin's policy of reviving the Orthodox Church. For more, see: Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, 7.

[16] For more on the codex, see: Vail' and Genis, *Shestidesiatye*, 7.

1955 Central Committee plenum required the press to show that rank-and-file workers in every corner of the USSR responded with enthusiasm to Khrushchev's promotion of the crop. On February 3, the text of his speech at the plenum appeared in *Pravda*, and replies followed in subsequent issues. Articles about Altai krai, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and many other regions trumpeted their "great enthusiasm" for efforts to wrest high yields of corn from their farms' fields. Such stories showed the readers how they were expected to respond: they saw that farms should expand corn plantings, as the Altai krai's "Path to Communism" collective farm did to nearly 1,000 hectares with the promise of a fourfold increase in the feed supply.[17] Similarly, an article on the front page of the February 6 edition explained how the farmworkers of Voronezh oblast discussed the plenum resolutions and, in response, named new obligations in a competition. It reported that the Molotov collective farm, which had begun growing corn a few years prior, had made just such a pledge.[18] This piece appeared alongside others, for example publicizing the pledges from Belarus to expand meat and milk output. The newspaper placed all of them beneath a banner reading, "Laborers of towns and the countryside announce their preparedness to realize the resolutions of the plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." With this, the Soviet press constructed a dialogue between Khrushchev and farmworkers who apparently welcomed plans to grow corn and achieve abundance. That conversation, in turn, signaled to readers the course of action expected of them.

Another aspect of this campaign showed readers the most modern methods in use on Soviet farms, a point that even an industrial worker, far removed from the cornfield, could view with pride. Even general-audience newspapers such as *Pravda* emphasized these modern technologies. Dry descriptions of or the technical specifications of a particular machine seem

---

[17] "Uvelichenie proizvodstva zerna – reshaiushee uslovie pod"ema zhivotnovodstva," *Pravda* (February 5, 1955): 1.

[18] "Posevy kukuruzy – istochnik kolkhoznogo bogatstva," *Pravda* (February 6, 1955): 1. Still others appeared the following day, on February 7, 1955.

unlikely to have captured the audience's imagination. Instead, images of equipment conveyed the message quickly. On March 7, 1955, a picture of a state-of-the-art corn planter appeared, and, on April 25, 1955, another of a similar implement in use in Ukraine's Odessa oblast. These images conveyed the message that farms planted corn in the most efficient way possible, a far cry from the truth since much corn was planted by hand that year. Other media venues conveyed this goal: the annual displays at the pavilion aptly named "Kukuruza," which opened in 1958 at the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy [*Vystavka dostizheniia narodnogo khoziaistva*, or VDNKh], showed best practices for growing corn and featured displays about farms that brought in large harvests. Although designed to speak to specialists, the exhibit also touted corn to passing exhibition goers.[19] This effort continued throughout the decade: after 1960, Khrushchev promoted "intensification" and emphasized the chemical industry's contributions of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides to agriculture. He claimed that these methods, which American farmers applied with increasing frequency, would raise yields of corn and every other crop to make Soviet farms meet his promises.[20]

Although the press aimed messages extolling the potential of corn at specialists and farmworkers, it also sought to influence the would-be consumers of the meat, milk, and other foods this "miracle crop" would make readily available. Khrushchev relentlessly promoted this message by linking corn to livestock feed, and it to fuller grocery shelves. If the people demanded enough meat and milk "to catch up with and overtake America," then the party had to embrace Khrushchev's plans to provide it. This vision became an unmistakable part of the

---

[19] For an article explaining the pavilion's displays on technical aspects of corn cultivation, see: B. Medvedev, "Otkrylsia vsesiuznyi smotr kukuruzy na zerno," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (October 11, 1959): 2. For a view of the pavilion as seen by the everyday Soviet citizen, see: I. Sokolov, "V gorode chudes," *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (May 19, 1961): 1. For more on VDNKh in the period, see: Sonja D. Schmid, "Celebrating Tomorrow Today: The Peaceful Atom on Display in the Soviet Union," *Social Studies of Science* 36, no. 3 (2006): 331–65.

[20] For a prime example of this, see: "Accelerated development of the chemical industry is the principle condition for developing agricultural production and for rising material conditions for the populace," his address to a Central Committee plenum on agriculture in December 1963. Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 8:261–340.

march to "construct communism," which inspired the calls in the Seven-Year Plan, ratified in 1959, for improved productivity and rising living standards.

Images associated with the plan evoked pride in Soviet achievements, and optimism about future successes. The illustration covering much of the front page of *Komsomol'skaia pravda* on January 1, 1960, represented corn as part of this larger message (figure 5). The most popular public holiday in the Soviet calendar and a substitute for the ideologically impermissible Christmas, New Year's Day offered citizens an opportunity to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new one. In this spirit, the image depicted the achievements of 1959: the nuclear-powered icebreaker *Lenin*, launched that year to much fanfare, embodied technical progress. New housing blocks, factories, and tractors conveyed a sense of economic advance. A rocket speeding toward the cosmos called attention to the Soviet space program, which basked in the light of the launch of *Sputnik* in 1957 and subsequent flights. Even a superficial glance at the rocket reveals that it combined symbols of technological modernity with images conjuring up Khrushchev's agricultural revolution: it consisted of a standard-looking nose cone and rocket engines, but a body made of layers of grapes, cotton, wheat, and corn. Each crop signified that the USSR's level of material abundance was soaring; truly, at that moment it appeared so. Impressive annual growth rates in industry and agriculture surpassed those of capitalist competitors. The efforts of Riazan oblast still looked like a miracle, not a calamity. Messages such as this one guided a broad swath of the public to see the Soviet Union on a path to progress and imminent abundance.

Furthermore, the authorities opened new stores and cafes featuring foods made from corn, designed to popularize the unfamiliar crop. The government set up cafes named "*Chudesnitsa*," in several cities, including on Moscow's Garden Ring near the Ministry of

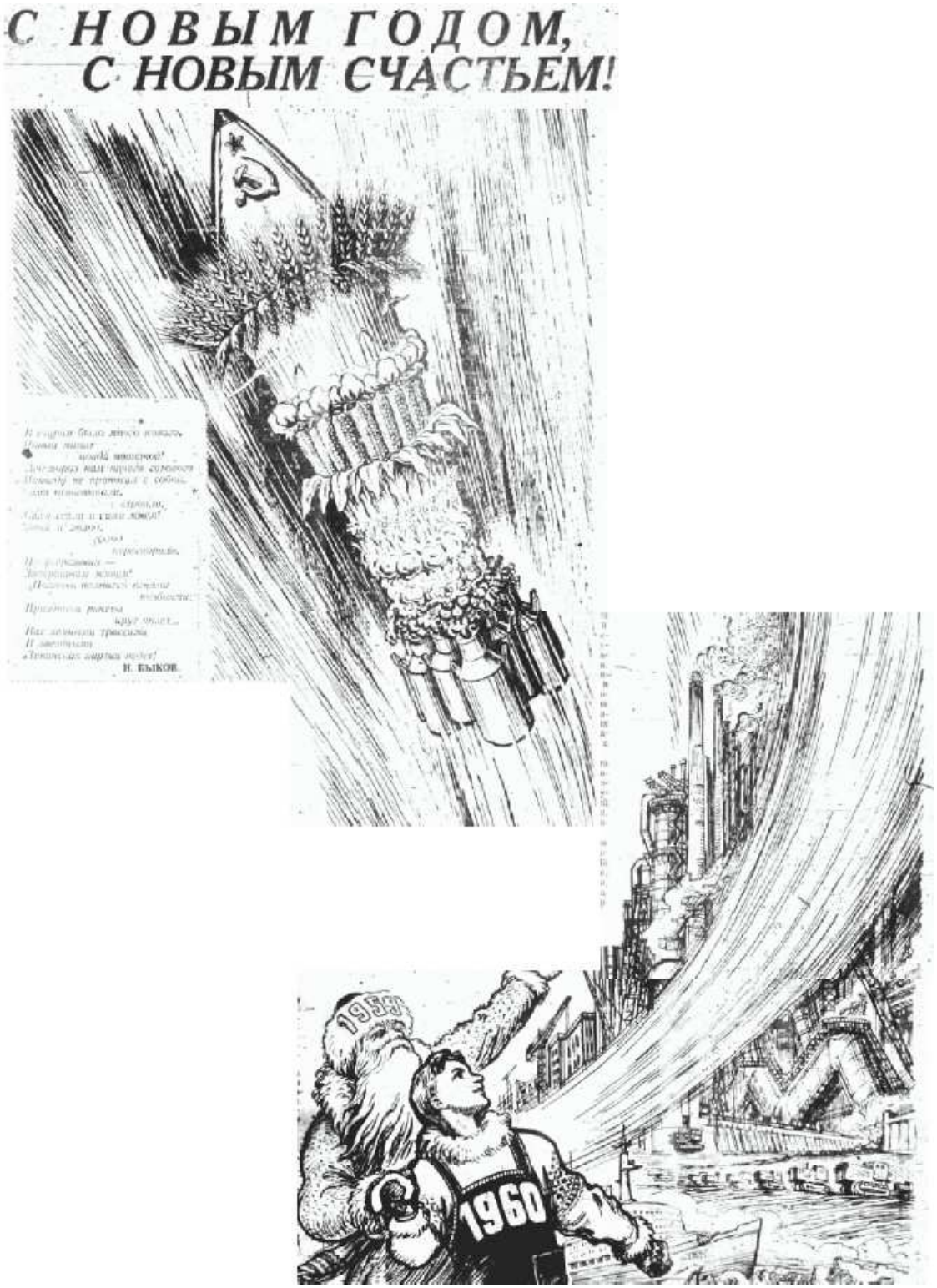


Figure 5: Details from image. "S novym godom, s novym schast'em," *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (January 1, 1960): 1

Agriculture, and on Leningrad's Nevskii Prospekt.[21] Stores devoted to foods made from corn appeared, including one on Moscow's Leninskii Prospekt. Searching several archives in Moscow, I did not discover materials about these shops; however, press coverage provides some insight. A 1963 profile of the Moscow store in the monthly journal *Kukuruza* heralded it: "When you cross the threshold of the new store, you automatically get the sense that foods made from corn are richly represented here." Extending the metaphor that dubbed corn "the queen of the fields," it further suggests that this richness was "regal," or "queen-like," and enthuses, "It is almost unbelievable that so many delicious things can be made from corn." The consumer could purchase cornmeal, corn oil, porridge, cornflakes, popcorn, canned corn, cakes, candies, and more, at least fifty different foods in all. Packaged to attract attention, each carried names evoking confidence: "Miracle," "Rocket," "Golden Cob," and "Amber."[22] In keeping with the spirit of the era's journalism, the article focused on everyday citizens.[23] According to the writer, the store received high marks from the customers for the quality of the service and of the foods for sale.[24] The customers, all women, embodied the ideal Soviet consumer, reinforcing historian Susan Reid's finding that shopping and other homemaking chores were not only the responsibility of women, but also were depicted in the press as feminine responsibilities.[25] So integrated with Khrushchev's vision was this store that, when he fell from power in 1964, both it and the entire imagery of corn-based abundance disappeared almost overnight.[26]

State enterprises produced the actual foods featured in those shops in quantities too

---

[21] Several sources attest to these cafés existence. On the one in Leningrad, see: N. B. Lebina and A. N. Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy: Kartiny povsednevnoi zhizni gorozhan v gody NEPa i khrushchevskogo desiatiletiia* (St. Petersburg: "Dmitrii Bulanin," 2003), 239. On that in Moscow, see: GARF, f. A-259, op. 45, d. 852, l. 115.

[22] "Za steklianye dvery magazina," *Kukuruza* 9, no.1 (1963): 52–53.

[23] Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, xiii–xix.

[24] "Za steklianye dvery magazina," *Kukuruza* 9, no.1 (1963): 53.

[25] Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen," 214.

[26] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 128

small to radically alter the average diet, but large enough to reinforce the symbolic relationship between corn and plenty.[27] For instance, in 1963, factories produced 15,500 metric tons of cornflakes and 1,000 tons of frozen corn-on-the-cob, in addition to fresh corn, canned corn, popped corn, and other culinary items. Spread among a population that numbered 225 million, this amounts to a paltry seventy grams (2.5 ounces) of cornflakes per person for the year, hardly enough to alter the average diet.[28] Regardless, advertising campaigns in the pages of *Kukuruza*, as well as the mass-circulation daily designed for agricultural personnel, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo*, encouraged readers to view the previously unfamiliar products as a nutritious and valuable food. Accounts of those who lived through the period suggest that this campaign achieved some success. Writing in American exile about the culture and atmosphere of the Thaw, essayist Petr Vail' and cultural critic Aleksandr Genis noted that, whereas the hallmarks of the Stalin era were solid and monumental (the metro, the war, high culture), those of the Khrushchev decade were eclectic and domestic: the ubiquitous five-storied housing block and popcorn.[29]

Rather than appealing for citizens to consume corn itself, Khrushchev and the press most often represented it as a source of beef, pork, milk, butter, cheese, and eggs. In a trend common to urbanizing societies, the people living in cities did not produce their own food, but instead purchased it in state shops or at the peasant market.[30] In the 1950s, about half of the Soviet population lived in towns and cities. Rural dwellers largely produced their own food on small private plots, earning for work on collective farms small dividends of grain, flour, and bread, staples they could not produce on their own. Urban workers, intellectuals, officials, and other

---

[27] Edward Geist notes efforts in the late 1930s to bring canned corn and cornflakes—signifying industrial modernity—to the ideal Soviet cuisine in the pages of the *Book about Healthy and Delicious Food*. Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik," 11–14.

[28] GARF, f. A-259, op. 45, d. 852, ll. 1–7 and l. 58. In comparison, a modern standard-sized box on grocery-store shelves weighs in at more than 200 grams.

[29] Vail' and Genis, *Shestidesiatye*, 209.

[30] Jenny Leigh Smith catalogues this process in chapter 3 of her dissertation. See, for example: Smith, "Soviet Farm Complex," 128.

consumers, by contrast, depended on state procurements; only those with cash could tap the private markets where collective farmers sold more expensive but varied produce.[31] In his speeches, Khrushchev linked corn to an abundant, nutritious, and varied diet. As early as June 1954, Khrushchev described how the Virgin Lands campaign and corn crusade promised to make good on this pledge. Seeing lagging productivity of livestock herds on state and collective farms, he diagnosed the problem as insufficient supplies of nutritious feed, a longstanding problem. Looking to American models, he determined that corn would provide it, and therefore tasked farms with using corn grain and silage to guarantee deliveries of meat, milk, and eggs to urban centers around the country.[32] In July 1954, he reinforced the message: "We want Soviet people to eat to their hearts' content, and not just bread, but good bread, as well as sufficient meat, milk, butter, eggs, and fruits. Living on bread alone, we might just get by. We must more than get by; we must ensure that Soviet people's lives become better and more beautiful every day. We have constructed a socialist society, and are confidently moving toward communism."[33] Moreover, this message formed the basis of his subsequent declarations that the USSR was in the process of "overtaking and surpassing America" in per capita output of these foods.

A source of material wealth and a signal of the potential for progress unlocked by modern industrial farming, corn—in an apparent paradox—also appeared in the press as a sort of miracle of nature. In her cultural history of advertising in late imperial Russia, Sally West finds that Russian advertising, like that of contemporaries around the world, connected the modern to the magical.[34] I do not want to overstress the resemblance, given the very different context of market competition and private advertising. The technological aspects of renderings of corn in the press are visible, for instance, in the image juxtaposing corn and the modernity of

---

[31] For more on these markets, see: Hessler, *Social History of Soviet Trade*.

[32] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:331.

[33] Ibid., 1:342.

[34] Sally West, *I Shop in Moscow: Advertising and the Creation of Consumer Culture in Late Tsarist Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 193.

the rocket. A cartoon in the March 14, 1962, issue of *Sel'skaia zhizn'* equated corn with the space age: accompanied by the caption "Animal husbandry and its 'sputniks," or its "traveling companion, the sketch depicts a globe of cattle, hogs, and chickens orbited by corn, beans, and sugar beets, the feeds for which Khrushchev lobbied. The leitmotif that corn was a "miracle crop" was most visible in the name "*Chudesnitsa*" for the cafes in Moscow and Leningrad. The term also appeared several times each year in *Pravda* and much more commonly in *Sel'skaia zhizn'*, especially between 1961 and 1964.

Furthering the idea that corn was special, exceptional, and even astounding, in a March 1955 speech Khrushchev conceded that the USSR might achieve the abundance he envisioned using other crops, but at greater expenditure of time and resources. Although claiming that communism was a practical and material stage, rather than "something pie-in-the-sky," he described corn as if it possessed almost-magical productive powers.[35] Echoing Khrushchev's enthusiasm, the press introduced audiences to the potential of the unfamiliar crop. In April 1955, a story in *Komsomol'skaia pravda* raved, "Corn is the key to increased grain production, to plentiful meat and dairy products. One little kernel of this miraculous plant, planted by caring hands, gives two or even three full-weight cobs; that is 1,000–1,500 grains and 4–5 kilograms of green mass." Translated into terms of food, "this means 1.5–2 liters of milk, 60–80 grams of butter, 2–3 cans of delicious canned corn or approximately 100 grams of pork. And this from only one little kernel!"[36] When early results did not meet his expectations, Khrushchev protested that corn would not work miracles without proper care. Failures to meet his expectations reflected poorly not on the crop, he charged, but on the leaders and farmworkers who planted it and expected a bounty of food without having to cultivate it, irrigate it, harvest it, and feed it to livestock. He complained that they "plant corn and wait to everything to happen on its own. No,

---

[35] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 2:27.

[36] "Pomozhem vyrastit' kukuruzu: Pis'mo studentov Voronezhskogo sel'skokhoziaistvennogo institut k studentam sel'skokhoziaistvennykh vysshikh i srednykh uchebnykh zavedenii," *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (May 5, 1955): 1.

corn is definitely not a fairytale crop. It gives high yields only to those who take the correct approach, work on it, and use the necessary technologies."[37]

The press emphasized the extraordinary qualities of the crop by referring to it as a "*bogatyrskaia kul'tura*," or "hero crop," evoking the knight-errant (*bogatyr*) who was the protagonist of many medieval Russian epic tales.[38] In March 1962, *Sel'skaia zhizn'* took this image a step further, combining the motif of the "hero crop," with Khrushchev's horse metaphor: a knight emblazoned with a red star and armed with a lance rides astride a horse made of corn. The banner overhead reads, "To the front!"[39] The image accompanies a quote from Khrushchev that further reinforces the point that corn was unusual and wonderful: "Corn is a blessing to humankind (*blago dlia chelovechestva*). Skillful cultivation of this valuable crop provides great wealth to the country and the people." The accompanying story noted that a hectare of corn yielding 50 metric tons of silage, a high but not record-breaking yield, would produce 1.56 tons of pork or 10.4 tons of milk. The story sought to shape readers' attitudes to corn, reinforcing the connection between the crop and abundance.

Creating anthropomorphized portrayals of corn, visual propaganda routinely used femininity to reinforce the message that corn offered abundance. Artists used a pastiche of styles loosely derived from earlier conventions for representing women.[40] When depicting corn, they

---

[37] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 3:184.

[38] See, for instance: "Moguchii potok," *Pravda* (February 2, 1960): 1; "Gimn kukuruze," *Pravda* (November 14, 1960): 2; "Tak vyrashchivat' kukuruzu," *Izvestiia* (December 2, 1960): 1; and "Bogatyrskoe zerno," *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (September 26, 1962): 1.

[39] The text reads: "*Na udarnyi front!*" The adjective "*udarnyi*" has meanings of "storm" or "shock," as in "*udarnik*," or "shockworker."

[40] Historian Victoria E. Bonnell identifies three in her study of photos and stylized representations of women on propaganda posters of the interwar period, the *baba*, the *kolkhoznitsa*, and the *krest'ianka*. These tropes help make sense of a theme equating an anthropomorphic and feminized corn with abundance, which did not recreate any one of the three types, but instead borrowed elements of both the *krest'ianka* and the *baba*. The earliest post-1917 images of peasant women drew on tropes associated with the *baba*, a pejorative term denoting a mixture of shrewdness and fecundity with backwardness and ignorance. During collectivization, propaganda posters appealed to urban audiences, convincing them that Soviet power had transformed the countryside. To that end, artists a new symbol for the peasantry: a young, thin, stern *kolkhoznitsa*, the female collective farmer. After 1934, posters had to appeal to rural

frequently created figures displaying neither masculine nor feminine characteristics. When they did abandon this gender neutrality, however, they always gave corn feminine features. Most common between 1962 and 1964, these images coincided with the development of a more lively visual style characteristic of Thaw-era publications. In the example of *Kukuruza*, this meant covers adorned with color and laid out using angular, geometric forms reflecting the influence of modernist graphic-design conventions revived after the Stalin period's conservatism. In contrast to the static, stiff portraits characteristic of earlier publications, the press carried more pictures of individuals at work. Playful imagery brought illustrations onto the pages of text and adorned headlines. The content of journals changed too, as *Kukuruza* began to include content not directly pertaining to science, technology, or production.

The femininity of corn revealed itself in three elements: first, the figures wear a shawl tied under the chin, in the fashion favored by older women and evocative of the *baba*. This contrasted to the kerchief, tied behind the head in the style of women workers, which sociologist Victoria Bonnell shows was characteristic of both the *kolkhoznitsa* and the *krest'ianka*. Second, stylized facial features such as rosy cheeks and red lips, as well as richer clothing such as an embroidered blouse, signaled beauty, a part of the makeup of the *krest'ianka* never seen on the *kolkhoznitsa*. Third, the slightly rounder silhouette of the corn in figure 6, in comparison with the straighter bodies of the gender-neutral cobs in the surrounding images, suggests traits associated with fertility. In this, the image remotely evokes the womanly *krest'ianka* of the late 1930s and the 1940s, not the slender *kolkhoznitsa* of collectivization-period posters. Images of feminized corn typically accompanied depictions of food, further reinforcing the equation of corn and abundance. For instance, the back covers of the December 1961 and January 1962 issues of *Kukuruza* present to the reader a range of modern convenience foods: popcorn, corn

---

audiences; therefore, they depicted not the *kolkhoznitsa*, who peasants might interpret as threatening, offensive, or even sexually aggressive, but a softer, more traditionally feminine peasant woman, the *krest'ianka*. Artists endowed her with a fuller figure, and depicted her at work on the collective farm as well as at home, enjoying the fruits of her labor. Bonnell, "The Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art of the 1930s," *American Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (1993): 55–82.

Figure 6: Kukuruza 7, no. 12 (1963).

oil, cornflakes, canned corn, and candies. In each, a figure of a corncob with a smiling human face looks on. Its femininity is marked by red cheeks and lips, as well as a green shawl tied under the chin.

The subsidiary images in figure 6, which appeared in the December 1962 issue of *Kukuruza*, reinforce the message that corn equaled abundant food. The sign at the center declares corn "a New Year's gift," and the crop's productivity is announced by placing the figure on a balance to weigh it. In the first and final images, the presence of *Ded' moroz*, or "Grandfather frost," the Russian Santa Claus-like figure associated with the holiday, signals that the page is a timeline for the year 1963, which moves from left to right, top to bottom. In the first scene, corn and the other feed crops celebrate the New Year along with a farmworker. In the second, third, and fourth images, the crops team up with cattle and hogs to measure and distribute corn and other feeds to fatten the animals. In the fifth image, sows show off their piglets, declaring, "Good food means a large litter!" Below that, corn provides food for humans: "dry breakfasts," that is, cornflakes, to schoolchildren on the left, while on the right convenience foods including cornflakes, cornmeal, porridge, corn oil, canned corn, and candies. The images at bottom return to the production sphere: they herald the arrival of new varieties (at left). On the right, tractors bear the promise that farms would "begin to prepare for [next year's] harvest already in the fall." At the bottom right, the point is that corn benefits, thanks to the productivity of hybrids, from the application of synthetic and organic fertilizers, which the sign marks as destined for the cornfield.

The press cast corn as a welcome part of the food supply to make it familiar, to Sovietize it, rather than to give it particular national characteristics, Russian or otherwise. To achieve this, publications offered readers snippets of a culture of corn. These represented a small, but significant part of the content of the "academic-technical" journal *Kukuruza*. In 1963, the total of 443 stories included more than 67 percent on technical or policy-related topics. Nonetheless, 35 articles (8 percent), or an average of 3 per issue, were classified under the rubrics "Corn on

the table," "Satire and humor," and "Read this, it is useful to know," the last offering stories instructing readers in the history and science of corn. These articles, images, poems, and songs accustomed the audience to corn's presence in Soviet fields and on the country's tables. The January edition, for instance, combined the story lauding the store on Moscow's Leninskii Prospekt with a brief piece on the appearance of the crop in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "The Song of Hiawatha." Articles published that year extolled corn's nutritional value and offered recipes for how to use cornmeal and other products derived from corn, both frequent features of the press. Others recounted the history of how ancient Mesoamericans domesticated corn, or offered readers jokes and games, all of which worked to make the crop familiar. In another example, in 1962, songs appeared in each of the May, June, September, and October issues. By comparison, in the twelve issues of the 1961 volume of *Kukuruza*, approximately twenty stories in the journal fit in similar categories, reinforcing the conclusion that the publication had grown more conscientious in appealing to the audience on these grounds, rather than on its narrowly technical ones alone. Finally, the journal reached a substantial audience: its print run grew from 44,600 in 1960 to 65,580 in 1964. Although this amounts to very few subscribers, the libraries of collective farms, technical colleges, and research institutes most likely subscribed to the publication, meaning it reached a much wider audience.

Corn also received Lenin's blessing. The prominence of his maxims, writings, and life story surged under Khrushchev, who packaged de-Stalinization as a return to a more pure Bolshevik past. For instance, between 1958 and 1965, a new printing of Lenin's voluminous collected writings appeared.[41] Historian Nina Tumarkin notes that the cult of Lenin reached a high point, and veneration included iconographic representations of his life and "reverence toward Leninism as to sacred writings, . . . so polished and so pervasive that it left no facet of

[41] V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochenenie*, 55 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1958–1965).

public life untouched."[42] This included even corn: for instance, the press reproduced a letter the first Soviet leader wrote to G. M. Krzhizhanovskii, chief of the state planning agency Gosplan, in October 1921. In it, he praised corn's potential as a new crop to aid efforts to feed the struggling country and to recover from the destruction suffered in the period of war and famine lasting from 1914 to 1921. Lenin ordered the Soviet government to secure supplies of seeds and to educate the peasantry about the crop's value. The journal *Kukuruza* told readers that the documents "demonstrate the enormous importance Vladimir Il'ich vested in corn as a practical resolution to economic challenges."[43]

Naturally, corn also featured in the emerging Khrushchev cult, which showered praise on him as head of state and party leader, but also on his policies. His former allies denounced this phenomenon when they ousted him in October 1964, but they could do little to stop it while he remained in power. To illustrate, a 1960 conference of corngrowers in Russia's Belgorod oblast praised Khrushchev and his corn policies. Invoking many achievements attained in 1959, the workers pledged even greater efforts in 1960. Communism was the course Lenin had charted, the text declares, and Khrushchev's leadership was bringing the USSR closer to that destination: "We are proud that victory in peaceful competition with the USA will be ours. Much depends on us, the corngrowers, and we will not spare our efforts."[44] Communist plenty and the mission to vie with the US for superiority represented moral incentives for workers, ideals that encouraged their efforts to work harder, produce more, and bring each one step closer.

* * *

The Soviet press marketed individuals who embodied these virtues as "vanguard

---

[42] Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 255–61.

[43] "Kul'tura neischerpaemykh vozmozhnostei: V. I. Lenin o dostoinstvakh kukuruzy," *Kukuruza* 7, no. 5 (1962): 4–5.

[44] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 286, l. 74.

workers," or *peredoviki* (sg. *peredovik*). N. F. Manukovskii, A. V. Gitalov, Liubov Li, E. A. Doliniuk, M. E. Ozernyi, and other similar corngrowers were reminiscent of the "shockworkers" (*udarniki*) and Stakhanovites of the 1930s. Back then, the most famous workers—those most studied by historians—busted norms in industry by emulating the eponymous coalminer A. G. Stakhanov.[45] Until recently, scholars had largely overlooked Stakhanovites in agriculture: challenging the finding that farmworkers sought only "minimum disadvantage" from interactions with the state, Mary Buckley convincingly shows that some women adapted to rural Stakhanovism, achieving their own ends.[46] Portrayals of these women in print and in film, as well as their performances at public meetings, cast them as the result of policies transforming the countryside, counterparts to male industrial workers. Women earned this honor by actively participating in these campaigns: playing assigned roles in public, these women sought moral and material rewards at the risk of ostracism for cooperating with the hated authorities.[47]

After the war, Stakhanovites and shockworkers gave way to the "vanguard worker." Encouraging outstanding production in socialist competitions, vanguard workers contributed to Khrushchev's corn crusade. In the ideal, well-managed farms and productive individual workers would embolden all to achieve similarly exceptional results. The idea was to provide incentives to the very best: much like the women of the 1930s, vanguard workers performed in mobilization campaigns and reaped rewards great and small. They might speak publically about their work; earn medals or awards; or achieve an honorary position in district-, regional-, republic-, or even union-level soviets. The latter, although only a symbolic vote in a rubber-stamp assembly, offered prominence and access to authorities, making it attractive. These

---

[45] Historian Lewis Siegelbaum finds that the Stakhanovite campaigns were in fact complex processes in which leaders, local authorities, and even workers pursued their own ends. See: *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6.

[46] Mary Buckley, *Mobilizing Soviet Peasants: Heroines and Heroes of Stalin's Fields* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 8. Buckley draws the term "minimum disadvantage" from: Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*.

[47] Buckley, *Mobilizing Soviet Peasants*, 6.

workers would then encourage the rest to improve their own productivity. As a republic leader in Lithuania put it in 1957, the goal was to "provide incentives to vanguard workers and spread word of their achievements." This, in turn, set an example based on "moral influence (*moral'noe vozdeistvie*) not only on the best, but on the entire group where they work, and has great import in educating peers."[48] Such expectations were, however, unrealistic given the fact that only a select few enjoyed the material support needed to make a good worker into a *peredovik*. Moreover, there is little evidence that many workers responded this way. In his studies of industrial labor, Donald Filter finds that these efforts rarely encouraged enthusiasm.[49]

How did the Soviet press portray vanguard corngrowers? Too many came and went during the Khrushchev decade to name each one, but a few stand out because they exemplified changes in methods for cultivating corn. One of the first vanguard corngrowers, M. E. Ozernyi of Ukraine's Dnipropetrovs'k oblast, had gained fame and rewards already before 1953. In his address to the September 1953 Central Committee plenum, Khrushchev paid tribute to Ozernyi as a model worker who had earned the coveted Hero of Socialist Labor medal and the Stalin Prize. The leader had known Ozernyi during his time in Ukraine, where in the late 1940s the collective farmer had grown record-breaking harvests surpassing 20 metric tons per hectare.[50] Ozernyi's fame spread in newspaper articles, pamphlets, and books, all of which encouraged readers to emulate him and instructed their audiences in the techniques needed to do so.[51] The

---

[48] LYA, f. 1771, op. 191, d. 423, l. 16.

[49] Filtzer finds that as early as the 1930s, the rewards that went to *udarniki* offered them upward mobility, setting them apart from the rest. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization*, 128. Furthermore, he finds that de-Stalinization changed an "established and expected" labor process relatively little. Ibid., 137.

[50] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:28. See, for example, Khrushchev's speech praising Ozernyi for raising a high yield of corn, and Ukraine for having yields comparable to those achieved in the USA. "K novym uspekham sotsialisticheskogo sel'skogo khoziaistva Ukrainy: Doklad tov. N. S. Khrushcheva na soveshchanii partiinogo, sovetskogo i kolkhoznogo aktiva Kievskoi oblasti, 28 ianvaria 1941 goda," *Pravda* (February 10, 1941): 4.

[51] See, for example: M. E. Ozernyi, "Moi opyt vyrashchivaniia vysokikh urozhaev kukuruzy," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (April 7, 1955): 3. In addition to the newspaper articles about him or under his byline, Ozernyi also had a number of books and pamphlets attributed to him. They include, but are not limited to: M. E. Ozernyi, *Kak ia vyrashchivaiu kukuruzu* (Moscow: Ministerstvo sel'skogo khoziaistva SSSR, 1955);

approved methods most common in 1955 required extensive manual labor to weed the plantings, but could produce high yields if applied properly.

As the USSR strove to use industrial farming technologies to plant, cultivate, and harvest corn, new vanguard tractor drivers achieved fame.[52] The most prominent were A. V. Gitalov of Kirovohrad oblast in Ukraine and N. F. Manukovskii of Russia's Voronezh oblast, who spoke before Central Committee plenums and performed other ceremonial duties.[53] Gitalov appeared on the front page of *Sel'skaia zhizn'* as part of coverage of the Twenty-second Party Congress in 1961. The image (figure 7) shows the corngrower before the dais, presenting a ceremonial ear of corn to Khrushchev and shaking the First Secretary's hand, as smiling and applauding leaders, including L. I. Brezhnev and A. I. Mikoian, look on. Gitalov had earned fame for having completed his assignment to work on Roswell Garst's farm in Iowa, returning to the USSR to spread the word about modern farming methods he had mastered there. Manukovskii similarly had led Soviet tests of these methods on his home collective farm, trying them out on conditions comparable to those faced by the average tractor driver on the average collective farm. Like many others, Manukovskii became the focus of documentary films designed to spread practical knowledge as they broadcast the fame of vanguard workers.[54] Given the widespread practice of showing of documentary and propaganda films, and the dozens preserved in the Russian State Documentary Film and Photo Archive, these films reached a broad audience. Even Khrushchev

---

Kukuruzu – vo vse raiony (Moscow: Sel'khozizdat, 1955); and *Sovety vyrashchivanii kukuruzy: Otvety M. E. Ozernogo na voprosy kolkhoznikov* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1955).

[52] D. V. Meksin, "U posledovatelei Aleksandra Gitalova," *Kukuruza* no. 9 (1963): 29–30.

[53] "Na Plenume Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS: Vystuplenie tovarishcha A. V. Gitalova," *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (January 18, 1961): 2; "Na Plenume Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS: Vystuplenie tovarishcha N. F. Manukovskii," *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (January 18, 1961): 3; "Vruchenie ordena Lenina Ukrainskoi SSR: Rech' tovarishcha A. V. Gitalova," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (May 12, 1959): 2.

[54] See, for example, the short documentary *K izobiliiu* (1958). Russian State Documentary Film and Photo Archive (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv kinofotodokumentov*, RGAKFD), *edinits khraneniia* (preservation unit) 15682. The segment in question is entitled, "The machine operator of the [Kirov] collective farm explains the work of his composite [*kompleksnaia*] brigade in cultivating corn."

XXII съезд КПСС. Никита Сергеевич Хрущев тепло обменивается рукопожатием с дважды Героем Социалистического Труда А. В. Гиталовым.

Фото Г. Самарова.

Figure 7: A. V. Gitalov and N. S. Khrushchev at the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961. *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (October 22, 1961): 1.

occasionally commented on their content.[55] In 1959, Gitalov and Manukovskii agreed to compete with one another not only to achieve the highest yield, but also to not use any inefficient manual labor. Moreover, they pledged to broadcast their hard-earned knowledge to every Soviet corngrower. The press coverage staging the event communicated to readers how Manukovskii wrote to Gitalov, "I propose that we include another point in the competition rules: to convey our experience to the young machine operators, and carefully teach them the newest methods."[56]

The press portrayed each as a Soviet everyman, but one whose outstanding dedication to his work made him a model for all. Gitalov's experiences in America reinforced his image as a practical man with whom the audience could identify. Outlining his training in Iowa under Roswell Garst, he described the farm and how he learned by doing. "I received the assignment of learning American methods of farm management," he recounted, "and the best way to achieve that is to sit oneself behind the wheel of a tractor."[57]

The press portrayed female vanguard collective farmers using the visual language developed in the late 1930s and the postwar period. Bonnell argues that, in the process of creating the *kolkhoznitsa* and *krest'ianka*, "political artists . . . feminized the image of the peasantry as a social category." She shows that artists gave the ideal women workers of the latter 1930s many of the characteristics of the *krest'ianka*. That image evolved in the postwar period into "the pastoral romance of high Stalinism," in which "plump, joyous women wearing embroidered blouses [sat] at the wheel of a tractor or combine. The sheaves of wheat have gotten bigger and symbols of prosperity are everywhere." Emphasizing traditional markers of

---

[55] See, for example, a record of his private memorandum to his inner circle of agricultural advisors in April 1959: RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 298, l. 94.

[56] "Zachinateli kompleksnoi mekhanizatsii vozdelyvaniia kukuruzy vstupili v sorevnovanie," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (March 22, 1959): 1; See also: "V kolkhoznoi traktornoi brigade A. V. Gitalova," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (June 18, 1958): 2.

[57] A. Gitalov, "U nas i v Amerike," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (January 3, 1959): 3.

femininity, visual artists created ideal images in which young figures with womanly physiques stood alongside representatives of an older generation.[58]

In the Khrushchev era, that first generation of collective farmers was represented by women such as E. A. Doliniuk. Born in 1914, she was the champion corngrower of Ukraine's Ternopil oblast, and the press commonly depicted her as a model for others, often by printing her picture. In one case (figure 8), *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* trumpeted the release of a propaganda poster featuring a candid picture of Doliniuk, decked out in her two Hero of Socialist Labor medals. She displayed the large stalks of corn that she grew in the field. The poster typifies the visual language used to portray her. She was always dressed simply, in clothing of a single color, with a light-colored headscarf tied behind her head. The two medals always adorned her jacket or blouse.[59] Each of these is reminiscent of the image of the *krest'ianka*, hardworking and enjoying the prosperity that accompanied success. An accompanying poem captured Doliniuk's celebrity:


Плакаты рассказывают

Евгения Долинюк, дважды Герой Социалистического Труда, звеньевая колхоза имени Сталина Мельнице-Подольского района Тернопольской области УССР, из года в год выращивает рекордные урожаи кукурузы.

Кукурузной массой и зерном
Тетя Женя со своим звеном
В стороне родной недаром славится...
Хочется сказать: везде, вокруг,
Как у тети Жени Долинюк,
Пусть растет такая же красавица!

Художник В. Говорков.
Стихи А. Жарова.

Figure 8: "Plakaty rasskazyvaiut," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (May 12, 1959): 3

Not for nothing in her native land,
Does Auntie Zhenia and her work team
Boast a reputation for corn feed and grain
It should be said, "Let a beauty
As in Auntie Zhenia Doliniuk's field
Grow everywhere, all around!"[60]

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Doliniuk often appeared in the Soviet press, as well as on stage at political events, much like

[58] Bonnell, "Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art," 79–80.

[59] See, for instance, a sketch accompanying a profile of Doliniuk: Ia. Makarenko, "Vsegda idti vpered!" *Pravda* (March 29, 1961): 3. Also: "Untitled," *Izvestiia* (November 16, 1961): 1.

[60] V. Govorkov, poem by A. Zharov, "Plakaty rasskazyvaiut," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (December, 5 1959): 3.

Gitalov and Manukovskii.[61] In December 1959, she outlined how her farm used the machinery Khrushchev championed in accordance with his American models. "Comrades, Mr. Garst explained that it is necessary to have hybrid seeds, machines, fertilizers, and, what's more, chemicals for destroying pests and weeds," she said. "We have the first three conditions on every collective farm." They still needed, however, more of all of them, as well as the chemicals needed to enlarge the harvests, cut the labor, and reduce the cost of production.[62]

As a record-breaking corngrower, Doliniuk became the focal point of a "people's academy," where she taught corngrowing methods to workers from her home oblast, and those who came from many others. According to Soviet officials, short-term practical training demonstrated approved corngrowing methods more effectively than a newspaper article or government pamphlet because they offered hands-on experience. "Schools of vanguard knowledge" such as Doliniuk's appeared in 1957 and spread quickly: by 1959, 300 leaders of Komsomol brigades attended the training session on her home collective farm consisting of single-day sessions in each of the four phases of the agricultural calendar, from wintertime preparations for the spring to planting, cultivating, and harvesting the corn. The press propagandized her name so much that hopeful youth arrived from other oblasts of Ukraine and even from Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.[63] And they achieved results: party officials reported that in as many as 100 cases the trainees had doubled the yield they had grown in the previous year.[64] Responding to that success, Ternopil oblast leaders expanded the program in

---

[61] She spoke at Central Committee plenums about her achievements, for instance in 1961. "Na Plenume Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS: Vystuplenie tovarishcha E. A. Doliniuk," *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (January 14, 1961): 2; "Vruchenie ordena Lenina Ukrainskoi SSR: Rech' tovarishcha E. A. Doliniuk," *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo* (May 12, 1959): 2. Additionally, she was the subject of a poster in early 1955 with a print run of 250,000, the largest of that year: "Za vysokii urozhai kukuruzy: Rasskaz E. A. Doliniuk" (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva sel'skogo khoziaistva SSSR, 1955).

[62] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 423, l. 23.

[63] See, for instance, a story on the school: V. Bol'shak, "Ocherk: Shkola Evgenii Doliniuk," *Pravda* (December 10, 1959): 2.

[64] RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, ll. 121–23.

1960 and 1961 and other oblasts began to adopt the format: by early 1962, 89 such schools existed and, in the course of their existence, some 21,000 Komsomol leaders, activists, and work team heads had completed the course.[65]

Figure 9: "A zavtra novyi trudovoi den'," *Kukuruza* 9, no. 1 (1963): 5.

By the early 1960s, Soviet journalists revealed more about vanguard workers' lives, illustrating the new focus on the individual. In contrast to Doliniuk, Ozernyi, Manukovskii, and Gitalov, the stories portraying the work of Liubov' Li detailed her daily life, although this too served didactic purposes. Li stood out because she lived in Uzbekistan, a non-Slavic republic, and was of a non-Slavic nationality herself: her name, a Russianization of the Korean family name often transliterated into English as "Lee" or "Rhee," indicates that she was a member of the Korean diaspora sent to Central Asia by Stalin. In the early 1960s, Li earned prominence as newspaper and magazine profiles hailed her achievements in the fields. At the same time, the images and stories offer a candid portrait of work and daily life.[66]Like the young, vigorous women Bonnell highlights as the hallmark of the late 1930s and the postwar

[65] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 31, d. 598, l. 66.

[66] At least eight stories, as well as additional stand-alone pictures of Li, appeared in *Sel'skaia zhizn'* between 1960 and 1964. See, for example: "Vot ona, 'koroleva polei'!" *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (July 14, 1960): 5; P. Savchuk, "Est' 1,000 tsentnerov kukuruzy na gektare!" *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (June 1, 1961): 2; "Bogatyrskaia kukuruza," *Sel'skaia zhizn'* (July 14, 1961): 1.

period, Li—a generation younger than Doliniuk—is always seen well dressed in the overtly feminine manner not of the *kolkhoznitsa*, but of the *krest'ianka*. Moreover, the accompanying stories highlight her role as mother of two young sons, as befits that image. The publication of two feature articles in the journal devoted to corn, *Kukuruza*, in the first six months of 1963 alone further illustrates the prominence she earned. Although far from the only woman among those featured in such stories, Li was a mother, a role with prominent place in the piece by V. Kliuev. It portrays a humanity and personality earlier profiles of vanguard workers lacked. It begins with Li returning home from the fields to be greeted by her sons, who present her with the stack of letters filled with inquiries and goodwill from around the Soviet Union received on a nearly daily basis.[67] The pictures accompanying the articles (such as that in figure 9) show her with head modestly covered in shawl or cap against the broiling Central Asian sun, devoted to the task of tending her fields.

As a Hero of Socialist Labor, a deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet, and as a model citizen, Li served as an example for all. Little about the media portrait of Li deviated from the life of the ideal Soviet person, even down to her rejection of religion. "Beyond the ocean, in corn's old homeland," one of the articles tells the reader, "people still believe in god and miracles. There was a time when, for example, Peruvian maidens brought forth bread baked from cornmeal as a gift for the sun." Central Asia witnessed nothing of the sort: "Liuba Li does not believe in god. She prefers her inspirational labor to him."[68] The publicity spreading a vanguard corngrower's fame intersected with related efforts because they attempted to shape the way the audience thought and, thereby, how it acted. In this case, the story contributed to the virulent antireligion campaign Khrushchev pursued in concert with the push to "construct communism." As historian Tat'iana Chumachenko shows, Stalin tolerated the church for

---

[67] V. Kliuev, "A zavtra novyi trudovoi den'," *Kukuruza* 9, no. 1 (1963): 4. See also: V. Kliuev, "Shkola Liubi Li," *Kukuruza* 9, no. 5 (1963): 7–9.

[68] Ibid., 5.

pragmatic reasons during the war, and afterward allowed it to open monasteries and train priests under the watchful eye of government minders. Pushing Soviet society to a new stage of development, Khrushchev closed monasteries and undertook propaganda campaigns against religion in an effort to achieve ideological purity and ensure that "the builders of communism" received a proper atheist upbringing.[69]

* * *

In tandem with this antireligious appeal, related efforts to educate youth and prepare them to live the communist ideal concentrated on work as a vital element of that upbringing. Authorities used propaganda campaigns, school programs, and youth competitions in hopes of strengthening the younger generation's work ethic and commitment to socialism. This reflected authorities' fears that the youth of a postwar society becoming urban and affluent had become increasingly disinclined to hard work and indifferent to ideology. Historian Juliane Fürst has shown that the postwar years "witnessed incredible propaganda successes and displays of loyalty by youth, but also saw the decline of youthful commitment to socialist values and ideology."[70] To illustrate, a report on a group of schoolchildren in Penza in 1959 described the previous four years of their working in the fields in their spare time. By making certain that students contributed to the local collective farm, the school had "conducted major work in the labor education of its pupils."[71] Corngrowing by schoolchildren and teenagers represented educational policies and practices designed to give students hands-on experience working in some sphere of production, both to teach practical skills and to inculcate appreciation for

---

[69] Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia*, especially chapter 3, "The Soviet State and the Russian Orthodox Church, 1958–1961," 143–188.

[70] Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, 3–5. A historical category rather than a universal one, Soviet authorities used the term "youth" to define people ranging from age fourteen to those entering early adulthood as soldiers, students, and workers. For a clear explanation of this term, its uncertainties, and the way it applies to this period in a Soviet context, see: Ibid., 7–8.

[71] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 456, l. 23.

manual labor.[72] Special literature aimed to teach children about corn and to encourage them to participate in growing it.[73] A search of a catalogue of periodical publications finds, for instance, dozens of articles on the subject in journals such as *Kukuruza*, *Narodnoe obrazovanie* (Popular Education), and related journals.[74]

Here too, the example of America influenced Soviet leaders. In 1955, the delegation the Ministry of Agriculture sent to the United States stressed the importance Americans ascribed to teaching teenagers to work. Members reported to Soviet leaders, including Khrushchev, that American rural communities nurtured an appreciation for manual labor. As a consequence, Soviet policies for growing hybrid corn drew in young people, who performed vital tasks in that process. Secondary students in the US might spend a portion of their summer vacation detasseling corn, and some did so in the Soviet Union. The First Secretary's belief in the importance of such efforts became apparent in an unguarded exchange he had with B. P. Sokolov, the hybrid-corn expert, as the latter reported on his trip to the US. Sokolov recounted how Americans expected youth to detassel corn and perform other work on the farm. "They really do habituate children to work," Sokolov exclaimed, describing how the sons of several of the researchers and university professors he met worked on nearby farms. "This is not," he clarified, "because they don't have money to feed themselves, but because they consider that [young people] should have work experience." Khrushchev retorted, "And *here*, if a professor

---

[72] For more on the context, origins, and purposes of this reform, see: Laurent Coumel, "The Scientist, the Pedagogue, and the Party Official: Interest Groups, Public Opinion, and Decision-making in the 1958 Education Reform," in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilič and Jeremy Smith. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 57 (New York: Routledge, 2009), 66–85.

[73] For example, see: I. I. Mar'iakhina, *Shkol'nikam o kukuruze i kormovykh bobakh: Posobie dlia uchashchikhsia sel'skoi shkoly* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva prosveshcheniia RSFSR, 1963); *Molodezhi o kukuruze: Populiarnyi ocherk* (Vologda: Oblastnaia knizhnaia redaktsiia, 1955); and D. E. Gavrilin, *Kukuruza i ee izuchenie v shkolakh i detskikh domakh: Posobie dlia uchitelei* (Moscow: Ministerstvo prosveshcheniia RSFSR, 1955).

[74] For instance: N. Deveki, "V bor'be za vysokii urozhai kukuruzy: Nekotorye itogi praboty kollektivov shkol Riazanskoi oblasti," *Narodnoe obrazovanie*, no. 3 (1956): 34–41; and L. Imshenetskaia, "Shkola v bor'be za vysokii urozhai kukuruzy," *Narodnoe obrazovanie*, no. 4 (1956): 39–40.

has a son and he finishes secondary school, he doesn't want to go to work!"[75]

The education reforms Khrushchev pursued in the late 1950s required students completing secondary education and seeking to enter higher education to perform manual labor and master a trade. The story of one student in Stavropol krai reveals how this initiative forced youth to participate in work such as the corn harvest, and the subtle forms of coercion they faced in the process. In the 1950s, regardless of Khrushchev's irritation at Soviet students' perceived aversion, authorities expected students and Komsomol members to weed and harvest corn by hand. The students' incentives were threefold: they received some pay, while refusal to work risked disapproval by peers, and, more consequentially, punishment by educational institutions or Komsomol committees. This work was, in the words of one who experienced it, "voluntary-compulsory."[76] In the autumn of 1958, students from a Stavropol medical college traveled to a nearby state farm to lend a hand during the corn harvest. This otherwise unremarkable event became the subject of a story in the krai youth newspaper, *Molodoi leninets* (Young Leninist). The story's title, "*Izhdivenets*," describes a dependent, but implies that the individual is undeserving beneficiary. The author leveled this charge at his subject, I. T. Kirakozov. A first-year student in the college's dentistry department, Kirakozov alone among his comrades did a poor job harvesting corn—according to the story. The author claimed that this was because Kirakozov resented having to pick cobs from the stalks by hand. When challenged to be more thorough and conscientious, the young man haughtily retorted, "If you don't like my work, do it yourself; I'll go home," at which point he left the field and returned to the city. For this, he received a mild reprimand from the college's Komsomol organization, to which he belonged. The reporter charged that this incident reflected a lifetime of coddling and unearned advantage. Khrushchev's educational reforms to combat this perceived ill, then coming into full force, required students applying for higher education to have proof of "experience in production." The

[75] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, ll. 139–40.

[76] Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 183.

author implied that Kirakozov had acquired the supposed experience recorded in his labor book at minimal effort thanks to family connections allowing him to work for a month in a sanatorium, and put in a few hours here and there at a machine shop.[77] The krai's main newspaper, *Stavropol'skaia pravda*, similarly named Kiriakozov "barchuk," a young lord, someone who was haughty and disdained work. "Let Kirakozov first work a bit in production," it counseled, "having perhaps learned to appreciate labor, he will be mature enough for the institute.[78]

The two articles demonstrate work's rising significance in the education system, but they do not tell Kirakozov's side of the story. He did this in a letter to the editorial board of *Molodoi leninets*, and in appeals to the krai party authorities. His entreaties provide additional details: first, after the events of November 1, he received a reprimand from the Komsomol committee. Then the newspaper articles attacked him, and only afterward, on November 19, was he expelled from the youth organization and the medical school, and not on the grounds that he had spoken rudely, but for poor academic performance.[79] Second, Kirakozov described his own version of the events of that day in the cornfield, adding crucial details the newspaper omitted, and reinterpreting them to his own benefit. He directed his rude remarks not at the team leader or at a fellow student, but imprudently at S. I. Maniakin, the head of the krai party committee's agricultural section, who happened to inspect the farm's operations that day. Maniakin had questioned Kirakozov about unharvested corn in nearby rows. Kirakozov responded that those were not his responsibility, speaking words similar to those reproduced without context in the newspaper story. Not rejecting all work, he stated only that he considered those rows others' responsibility. He acknowledged within a few minutes that his words were "tactless" and "hot-tempered," and asked for Maniakin to forgive him. The official, however, "did not accept my plea

---

[77] A. Zviagintsev, "Izhdivenets," *Molodoi leninets* (November 14, 1958): 3.

[78] L. Epaneshnikov, "Fel'eton: Barchuk," *Stavropol'skaia pravda* (November 12, 1958): 3.

[79] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7917, l. 70.

for forgiveness and began to threaten me with expulsion from college." Kirakozov conceded that he left the farm, but for a reason he considered justifiable. He had neither been forced to leave nor had quit in anger, but instead had secured the blessing of his superiors to travel the thirty kilometers to the city of Stavropol on foot, seek out Maniakin in the party committee offices, and beg his pardon once again. When he arrived, Maniakin was not there. Kirakozov instead told his story to a party official who encouraged him to learn a lesson from the incident and return to work on the farm, which he did. Only later, when the newspaper articles appeared, did Kirakozov perceive the danger to his otherwise bright future as a student. In his letter, he hinted that the stories and the punishment happened at the instigation of "an influential person," that is Maniakin, who falsely built the case against him.[80]

Kirakozov's pleas to the newspaper editors and to the Komsomol authorities, however, apparently achieved little. Dated January 20, 1959, the letter caused the head of the students' section at *Molodoi leninets* to write to the krai party committee inquiring about the incident. In his memorandum, he expressed sympathy for Kirakozov. "Judging by the impression," he wrote, "[Kirakozov] made during a face-to-face meeting, and according to his story, the behavior of . . . Comrade Maniakin was not entirely objective." Unfortunately for Kirakozov, nothing seems to have improved as a result: in March, the krai party committee reaffirmed the validity of Kirakozov's expulsion from the Komsomol and the college.[81]

The story of the chance conflict between Maniakin and Kirakozov, illustrates the unease officials felt at the links between work and education. As historian Donald J. Raleigh documents, students in higher education were commonly assigned to harvest-time tasks, but many tried to avoid it and few found the work itself a positive experience, especially in light of conditions on the collective farms. At most, a few bonded with peers during these forays into the country: "We were young," one recalled, "we were with girls, there were dances, and we celebrated birthdays

[80] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7917, l. 71.

[81] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7917, ll. 68–69.

and organized picnics."[82] Publicizing the incident involving Kirakozov, the local press created a morality tale for others, demonstrating the consequences of refusing to join enthusiastically in the labor required by Khrushchev's education reform. In this version of the story, Kirakozov was unprepared for the work of harvesting corn because he had not been properly trained to appreciate manual labor. Furthermore, the incident illustrates the capricious, personal nature of power. Kirakozov was a relatively well-connected man: his father was vice rector of a college and his aunt served as a deputy in the town soviet and managed the sanatorium where the young man had worked. His privileges and connections, however, could not protect him against someone with more authority, a party post, and the connections to newspaper editors required to carry out a vendetta against a young man of perhaps nineteen years.

* * *

In addition to assigning students short-term tasks such as aiding farms in harvesting corn, authorities created student brigades to tend crops for an entire growing season, a program designed to accustom youth to regular work, to teach them about agriculture, and to inculcate appropriate values. In groups of fifty or more, high-school students banded together, under supervision, to cultivate crops, especially corn, in an environment resembling an agricultural summer camp. Living, working, learning, and having fun together, the students took responsibility for the crops, and in return earned wages, along with knowledge of and appreciation for an honest day's work. Like other efforts of the period, this program was a response to rising concerns that the educational system permitted students to eschew such labor because they expected to graduate high school and move immediately higher education and the white-collar professions. The brigades first formed in Stavropol krai, but later earned the praise of national leaders, including Khrushchev himself. On a visit to the krai, he noted the "outstanding" achievements of students in the brigades who, "combining study with moderate

[82] Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 183–84.

work, achieve high yields of corn, wheat, and sunflowers."[83]

The program was designed to inculcate in participants an appreciation for manual labor and practical knowledge about farming. Called "student production brigades," or *uchenicheskie proizvodstvennye brigady*, the first formed in Stavropol krai's Novo-Aleksandrov district in 1955. By 1958, their fame had spread, earned them frequent praise, and ensured that other regions and republics replicated the program. In 1958, at an interregional conference dedicated to the program and the participants, an official of the krai educational department drew attention to the perceived defect of secondary schools. Citing Khrushchev's words, he denounced the schools' "detachment from real life," which they passed on to students by shaping their attitudes to work and preparing students only for white-collar careers. Teachers and parents threatened students who behaved or performed poorly, "If you don't do well in school, you'll have to go work on the collective farm." The new requirements for manual labor went hand in hand with the renewed emphasis on the party's efforts "to construct communism." The education administrator lamented that students listened passively to frequent lectures about the importance of labor, but this achieved little. "Communist upbringing cannot be divorced from labor," he said, "or detached from real life, from the workers' real struggle to construct a new society."[84] Put another way by the Komsomol Central Committee's representative at the conference, the present generation needed "to prepare . . . for a life of useful labor, which inculcates in Pioneers and schoolchildren the high moral qualities required in a communist society."[85]

In the program, students in their final years of secondary school volunteered for a

---

[83] This excerpt from a speech Khrushchev gave while visiting the territory in October 1958 appeared in: "Shkola, trud, kommunizm," *Molodoi leninets* (November 15, 1958): 3.

[84] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1132, ll. 8–9. This section draws heavily on documents from the files (f. 63) of the Stavropol krai Komsomol committee.

[85] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1132, l. 3.

summer, joining a group that combined work, education, and recreation.[86] In contrast to an adult collective farmer's eight or more hours, the students worked only six hours for equal pay, with remaining hours given over to rest and recreation.[87] School personnel and the farm specialists oversaw the brigades, which cultivated corn, especially plots where hybrid seeds grew. Beginning with one group in 1955, the program swelled to 122 groups in 1956, 239 in 1957, and more than 300 in Stavropol krai alone in 1958 and 1959.[88] In 1958, the 25,000 participants cultivated 34,000 hectares of corn, along with other crops.[89] In 1959, they cultivated approximately 50,000 hectares of cropland, or 5 percent of the krai's 1 million hectares.[90]

The summer camps sought to shape students' actions, but also to transform participants' attitudes. The chairman of the "Rossiia" collective farm in the krai's Novo-Aleksandrov district likened the program to "a trip like one to the Virgin Lands." Parents were pleased with students' promises "to never let dear friends down, and to work as never before." On a practical level, the chairman noted, "they learn to follow the schedule in work and in leisure, conducting themselves as they should." The transformation was clear: "We once had *beloruchki*: there were those who didn't want to work while in school, but that time is past. Now there are no more *beloruchki* here."[91] The chairman's idiomatic expression, meaning "a person with uncalloused [lit. "white"] hands," indicated haughty disdain for dirtying them. This imagery of

---

[86] Summer camps of various sorts were common, as the Baby Boomers interviewed by Donald J. Raleigh in his oral history of the generation recounted. Whereas local party elites might send their children to exclusive camps on the Black Sea, many students in Saratov's school No. 42 stayed nearby. They lived in tents, tended campfires, and bonded through collective maintenance of the campsite at "Camp Labor and Rest" on an island in the Volga River. They grew up through exposure to life away from home and parents. The students of another specialized English-language school, this one in Moscow, reported similar experiences at camp. There, teachers attempted to enforce rules requiring them to speak only English, but mostly the students had fun and maintained the campsite. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 101–6.

[87] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1132, l. 12.

[88] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1134, l. 152.

[89] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1135, l. 8.

[90] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1134, l. 152.

[91] GANSIK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1132, l. 124.

transformation through labor tapped a vein in Soviet ideology that envisioned recasting individuals to make them suitable for creating and then flourishing in the new communist society. As a krai party committee official explained, "The most valuable part of the brigades is that they produce new people (*novye liudi*)."[92] This mission to transform the citizen into the "new person" was central to Soviet ideology. As historian Thomas Wolfe noted, the Communist Party proclaimed that socialism would "transform human conduct" and reshape human nature to make it suitable to the new society. Prominent in the early years of the Soviet experiment, the undertaking reemerged under Khrushchev as the requirement to educate the builders of the coming communist society. Wolfe wrote that this was "a plan for modeling of 'new' persons who both embodied and fulfilled the promise of socialism."[93] Lest the brigades prioritize work only, the participants—at least in the ideal—also received opportunities for intellectual, political, and artistic development.

Speakers at a conference called to praise the program unsurprisingly spoke in glowing terms about the results, but the students also confronted real challenges. Reports from 1958 suggest that conditions had been harsh in previous years. "In comparison with last year, the brigades work in the best conditions," a report on Petrov district's fifteen brigades recognized. The local party committee had provided better shelter, timely transportation, and hot meals, all absent before. These improvements did not, however, eliminate "instances of callous attitude toward the student brigades," in which the leaders of farms and other organizations refused to provide such necessities. Agronomists failed to instruct or monitor the students. Farm managers commandeered them for work outside their assignments.[94] Some leaders expressed misgivings, moreover, about the participants' motivations: "Little has yet been done to organize labor and achieve educational goals. . . . The students consider pay the most important objective of

---

[92] GANSIK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1132, l. 144.

[93] Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism*, 1.

[94] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1134, l. 106.

participation. They understand the educational goals poorly, as well as the purpose of the brigade: to complete tasks the party and government assign to improve agriculture."[95] Declarations that the students worked hard notwithstanding, some exploited opportunities to shirk work and use the time for recreation. In the Sukho-Buivolinsk school's brigade, leaders allowed lax discipline, which "many students demonstrated by running off into the orchard or to the pond during work periods, [with the result that their] plots are poorly cultivated."[96] Despite lofty rhetoric about reshaping teenagers into vanguards of the communist future, some viewed it as a chance to spend the summer away from parents and among friends, all while earning a little money. As Raleigh's Baby Boomers recounted about their experiences in summer camps, they considered the work secondary to other pursuits, from swimming and singing to transgressing the rules: that is, in the words of one, "going exactly where they forbade us to go." Even when they worked with enthusiasm, the work was not always done effectively: "It meant doing some fun work on the nearby kolkhozes," Irina Tsurkan recalled. "I remember that they sent us city kids to weed carrots. We good-naturedly weeded and weeded. Not a single carrot was left. We pulled them all up!"[97]

These brigades, in seeking to develop "new people," foreshadowed the publicized "communist labor brigades" [*brigady kommunisticheskogo truda*] that followed in 1958. The latter campaign responded to resolutions of a Central Committee plenum and the Twenty-first Party Congress, as well as the tide of propaganda heralding the "construction of communism." As a speaker at the Stavropol krai youth festival in November 1958 put it, the student brigades were only a first step: "Those who work in student brigades demonstrated heightened interest in studying the parts of the curriculum on agriculture." Moreover, "their attendance rates increased significantly and, by using their work experience, they set an example of study and

[95] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1134, l. 108.

[96] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1134, l. 109.

[97] Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 102–4.

conduct for the younger students."[98] These traits made them successful participants in the communist labor brigades, which combined obligations for output with rules for conduct and guidelines for instruction in politics. As one official stated:

> Who are the young people who have given their all to working to make communism a reality? They are those educated in our schools. . . . They worked in the summer on collective farms and now, when they have received their own assignments, they understand that they must contribute their knowledge and youthful vigor. They must not work any old way; instead, they must work as communists (*po kommunisticheski*), as V. I. Lenin taught us, as the Communist Party teaches us.[99]

This was the result Komsomol organizers sought, and they broadcast it to wider audiences. At the Thirteenth Komsomol Congress in April 1958, a young woman from Stavropol krai, Comrade Dobrovol'skaia, described her experience: "Working in the brigade provides great moral satisfaction. The guys (*rebiata*) are correct to say that [it] encourages self-reflection, teaching us life skills, hard work, and constructive pastimes," including team sports, the arts, and group trips.[100]

* * *

From 1955 through 1964, the press coverage of Khrushchev's corn crusade highlighted examples of success in growing the feed crop, especially using industrial farming methods for cultivating it. As this chapter's examination of corn propaganda suggests, representations of corn encouraged audiences to consider corn a symbol of abundance. Images equated corn with plenty by making the crop into a figure with features signaling femininity and fertility. The press underscored that this "queen of the fields" was a source of novel modern foods such as cornflakes, but also that it was most important as livestock feed needed to provide the meat and dairy products consumers wanted. This portrayal, moreover, cast corn as an almost miraculous

---

[98] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1135, l. 240.

[99] GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1135, l. 226.

[100] "Rech' T. Dobrovol'skoi, uchashcheisia 10 klassa srednei shkoly No. 20, stanitsy Goriachevodskoi, Stavropol'skogo kraia, na XIII s"ezde VLKSM," *Molodoi leninets* (April 19, 1958): 5.

phenomenon, an idea seemingly at odds with the technological wonders of modern corn cultivation. The Soviet press thereby tried to change the attitudes toward corn of a large audience of consumers.

Furthermore, the mass media aimed more narrowly tailored messages at farmworkers, encouraging them to work conscientiously to plant, cultivate, and harvest corn as a contribution to efforts to provide abundance for all. These workers saw the praise heaped on "vanguard" corngrowers who set an example of productive labor in the fields. These "moral incentives" hoped to achieve enthusiasm for farm work by appealing to desires to emulate these ideal laborers, to secure world peace, to construct communism, and live out socialist virtues. Instead of coercing workers, these incentives were meant to shape their conduct by influencing their understanding of the world and, thereby, their individual aspirations. As a result of these practices of "governmentality," citizens would—in the ideal—choose to contribute to the corn crusade and the Soviet project in general. Evidence that these messages achieved major success is difficult to see, even in light of the optimism that reigned in society in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The press chose female corngrowers as vanguard workers, and created feminine representations of them. These evolved from Stalinist conventions developed in the 1930s that gendered the peasantry feminine. And, indeed, women did much of the work needed to carry out the corn crusade—including vast amounts of manual labor weeding and tending corn before the widespread adoption of machines after 1960. The grandiose Stalinist visions of happy, singing peasants and bursting shocks of wheat, which Bonnell shows were characteristic of the postwar period, gave way. By the early 1960s, portrayals focused on the individual person and on her experiences that, even if more genuine, still served the purpose of embodying an ideal. The quintessence of the Khrushchev era was not the "bucolic bliss" and "happy peasants who, in

their spare time, performed folk dances in front of the Kremlin,"[101] but one of calm determination and motherly warmth, as in the portraits of Liubov' Li in photos and prose.

Educational programs, as well as the press coverage of them, emphasized how work—including that done in tending corn—inculcated good morals and communist values. "Student production brigades" assembled for the summer offered moral incentives to youth participants, another effort to mold the conduct of the rising generation. Participation in the group obliged students to remake themselves through labor, preparing them to remake society—all while producing food and other useful agricultural products. Although voluntary and paid, work performed by students also carried a latent but present element of coercion, as in the case of the dental student Kirakozov and his school group's work harvesting corn.

Each of these tools exemplified the efforts by the Soviet press to carry out a mission to refashion people by influencing not only their actions, but also their values and understandings of the world around them. Rather than coercing them, state and party authorities wanted citizens to act of their own initiative, but within the boundaries prescribed by official policy.

[101] Bonnell, "Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art," 81.

CHAPTER 6

COMPETING FOR CORN: MOBILIZING YOUTH TO GROW "THE QUEEN OF THE FIELDS"

The Komsomol, or Communist Youth League, sponsored corngrowing competitions for youth during the entire decade of the corn crusade. Using propagandistic exhortations to incentivize participants, Komsomol leaders and the press made corn a "front" on which young farmworkers could "struggle for high yields." Concurrently, these contests offered prizes and awards to the winners. Much like the practices of Soviet journalism Wolfe documents, the Komsomol was an instrument of "governmentality," shaping the attitudes and the actions of youth. The competitions achieved considerable success by some measures: hundreds of thousands of youth participated in the corn project during the decade, tending millions of hectares of corn, and harvesting tens of millions of metric tons. In some oblasts and republics, they grew as much as one-half the crop. For instance, in 1960 the Komsomol expected members to cultivate 14 or 15 million hectares of corn, nearly 50 percent of the total for the USSR, although the actual figure reached only 11.6 million.[1]

The Komsomol appealed to young citizens in their teens and twenties to engage in the corn crusade. Intended to inspire a new generation, the project drew on practices with a long pedigree. During the Civil War, the Bolsheviks mobilized sympathizers, party members, and Komsomol members to the frontlines in moments of crisis. As Donald Raleigh documents, these efforts often did not achieve much success due to the fragility of Komsomol and other organizations.[2] They did, however, provide precedent for later mobilizations during the First

---

[1] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 483, l. 30. This chapter taps reports on the competitions from regions found in the files of the Komsomol Central Committee. These are housed in a special section of RGASPI, and denoted with the letter M, for *molodezh'*, or youth. The collection and the inventory (f. 1, op. 9) of the Department for Rural youth, which managed the campaigns, contains the bulk of the relevant documents.

[2] Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War*, 129.

Five-Year Plan (1928–32), when Komsomol members, inspired by the slogan "On the march for metal," contributed to constructing the titanic Magnitogorsk steelworks on previously barren steppe.[3] Beginning in 1954, the youth organization marshaled volunteers for Khrushchev's Virgin Lands campaign.[4] By 1955, it joined efforts to grow corn across the Soviet Union, echoing its earlier motto by proclaiming its members to be "On the march to raise corn."

The Komsomol corngrowing competitions demonstrate how the corn crusade worked in practice, how the organization functioned as part of the bureaucracy managing the economy, and how leaders tried to soothe their own fears about the commitment of the young generation to socialist ideals. In particular, the contests of early years of the corn crusade shed light on Khrushchev's fight to supplant centralized government ministries with the Communist Party, and its Komsomol subsidiary, as a driving force in the economy. By the early 1960s, the competitions evolved, incorporating under tight control elements of the social activism associated with Khrushchev's ideological formulation that the USSR was becoming a "state of all the people" as it "constructed communism."[5]

* * *

Mobilizing youth for work to create politically active citizens, Komsomol leaders preached the virtues of Khrushchev's corn crusade using a militant tone reminiscent of the Civil War and World War II, when the Komsomol had organized young people for military service. "Fighters on the corn front," they declared, should put themselves "in the vanguard of the

---

[3] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 76.

[4] For more, see: Michaela Pohl, "Women and Girls in the Virgin Lands," in *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Melanie Ilič, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 52–74.

[5] For more on the ideology of the "state of all the people," see: Aksiutin and Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo*, 200–45. Breslauer explores this phenomenon, which coincided not only with the new Communist Party Program, but also with Khrushchev's renewed attack on Stalin. A new, albeit unrealized, constitution to replace the one that Stalin passed in 1936, would have embodied the ideals Soviet leaders developed based on Marx's expectation that the state would "wither away." Khrushchev declared that everyone, even those who did not join the party, would commit to needed efforts, eliminating the need for a bloated government apparatus. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, 104–5.

competition to achieve high yields of 'the queen of the fields." The Komsomol also ensured that its committees and members contributed to the crusade. In 1955, the first year of the corn crusade, activists organized 100,000 work teams, or "links" [sg. *zveno*, pl. *zven'ia*], each comprising on average approximately ten members.[6] The corngrowing competition enlisted at least 1 million young people that year alone to do manual labor in the fields, a feat enabled by the Komsomol's expanding membership, which doubled between 1949 and 1958.[7] Furthermore, it reached more collective farms than ever before, enrolling more rural youth in the organization and in efforts such as this one. They hoped thereby to soothe fears that the younger generation shared neither socialist ideals nor the common experience of the war, instead harboring lax attitudes toward ideology and labor. The corngrowing contests were not unique, as authorities employed similar strategies in other spheres of production, for instance, one for employees of the Machine Tractor Stations (MTSs), to harvest and store more silage, hay, and other fodder. The Komsomol also established prizes for youth who distinguished themselves in machine trades or coalmining. The corngrowing competitions, however, lasted longer—from halting efforts in 1954 to full-scale national campaigns continuing through 1964—and attracted higher rates of participation than the others.

The success of corngrowing mobilizations that I document is at odds with historians' findings about parallel efforts to offer incentives to industrial workers. Donald Filtzer found that, under Khrushchev, socialist competitions failed to strengthen labor discipline in factories. Reversing Stalin-era practices, Khrushchev's initiatives and speeches acknowledged a need to encourage, as Filtzer concluded, "the working population to begin to identify its own needs and interests with those of the regime." Competitions combined material and moral incentives to encourage productivity and discipline, but workers disregarded them, viewing them as avenues

---

[6] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 352, l. 100.

[7] Allen Kassof, *The Soviet Youth Program: Regimentation and Rebellion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 63.

for bosses to reward the undeserving by falsifying results.[8] I do not argue that Filtzer is wrong; instead, I contend that youthful enthusiasm for corn lent these Komsomol-led corngrowing contests a distinctive character.

In general, younger generations support innovation and challenge the status quo; moreover, postwar prosperity helped define generations who came of age beginning in the 1950s in many countries. In studying this generation, Raleigh finds that their formative years reflected the less turbulent postwar era. Whereas their parents had firsthand experience with fear under Stalin and wartime tribulations, the Baby Boomers were optimistic and enthusiastic in their youth.[9] Many participants in Komsomol competitions in 1955, perhaps born between 1928 and 1938, were somewhat older than the 1967 high-school graduates Raleigh studies, but by 1964, competitors were members of the postwar generation. Moreover, because the earliest competitors were too young to have experienced the war, they were more likely to share an outlook with those younger than with those a few years older, born before 1928 and of military or working age during the war. The politics of generation remained a feature of Soviet life afterward, as leaders attempted to mobilize youth in the 1970s to construct the Baikal–Amur Mainline railway (BAM).[10]

Small-scale corngrowing competitions began in a few oblasts and republics in 1954, predating by a year Khrushchev's full-scale rollout of the crusade. Responding to his initial praise for corn in September 1953, Belarus and Latvia, as well as Russia's Omsk, Briansk, and Arkhangel'sk oblasts—all located beyond corn's traditional range—held a local contest in 1954. The Latvian Komsomol organized 800 work teams, and charged them with growing 10,000 hectares of corn. In the typical positive tone, the republic Komsomol described to Moscow

---

[8] Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization*, 41.

[9] Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 162. For more on the role of formative experiences in defining generations, see: Ibid., 381, note 32.

[10] Ward, *Brezhnev's Folly*.

efforts to overcome local officials' opposition, as well as technical mistakes resulting from the unfamiliarity of the crop and the methods for growing it. The work teams that raised the highest yields earned scarce consumer goods such as cameras, radios, and wristwatches.[11] In Belarus, over 1,400 work teams participated, similarly struggling to overcome the crop's unfamiliarity and local leaders' opposition.[12] These practices set the tone for subsequent years, when they combined with efforts to conduct educational outreach, oversee production, and overcome farm mangers' skepticism.

Beginning in 1955, Komsomol bosses committed their organization to Khrushchev's corn crusade. At the January 1955 plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Komsomol First Secretary A. N. Shelepin pledged that youth would cultivate the crop, and that the Komsomol would employ tested strategies to organize them. Addressing a Komsomol Central Committee plenum convened on February 17–18, 1955, to reaffirm that promise, Shelepin stressed the organization's obligations and echoed Khrushchev's formula that corn offered "the solution to two problems" by simultaneously producing grain and silage. "Until recently," he lamented, "corn has been confined, undervalued, and planted only in southern regions, and even there in insignificant quantities."[13] Extolling the efforts made in 1954, he exhorted his audience to extend that style of competition to every oblast, district, and farm.[14] This required meetings to explain the significance of corn, to demonstrate approved methods for growing it, and to organize work teams dedicated to growing it. To support this mission, Shelepin proposed adopting and publishing an open letter urging Komsomol members to lead this corn crusade.[15] On February 24, 1955, the bureau Komsomol Central Committee, its

---

[11] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, ll. 64–70.

[12] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 315, ll. 7–18.

[13] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 2, d. 343, l. 60.

[14] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 2, d. 343, l. 64.

[15] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 2, d. 343, ll. 67–68.

permanent executive committee, approved a text for publication designed "to mobilize youth for the struggle for raising corn."[16]

The following day, the front page of *Komsomol'skaia pravda* featured the letter, which called on youth to join the Komsomol "On the march to raise corn!" Addressing members and nonmembers alike, even those not already involved in agriculture, the letter envisioned mass participation by students in technical and high schools, and even by members of the Pioneers, aged seven to twelve years. The language and style echoed boilerplate phraseology, which *Komsomol'skaia pravda* later continued to use to promote the corn-growing contests. It called for "Komsomol zeal" from all who would engage "in the struggle (*bor'ba*) for high yields of corn," and provided specific guidance for spring planting. It ended with a clarion call: "Join the competition! Let work team compete with work team, brigade with brigade! Spare no strength in growing high yields of corn everywhere this year!"[17]

The press spread this message to a wide audience. The letter appeared in central newspapers such as *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture's daily, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo*. The next day, *Moskovskii komsomolets* [Moscow Komsomol], the newspaper of the Komsomol's Moscow city and oblast committees, published the letter.[18] The call to action appeared in local newspapers, including semiweekly publications issued by vanguard collective farms, a rarity in 1955. On March 4, *Stalinets* [the Stalinist], the newspaper of the Stalin collective farm in the Chuvash ASSR, lauded in January by Khrushchev for growing corn beyond its traditional range, catalogued the responsibilities of the farm's Komsomol members.[19] The Komsomol Central Committee ordered distribution of 300,000 copies of a flyer relaying the

---

[16] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 3, d. 858, ll. 15–19.

[17] "V pokhod za vyrashchivanie kukuruzy!" *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (February 25, 1955): 1.

[18] "V pokhod za vyrashchivanie kukuruzy!" *Moskovskii komsomolets* (February 26, 1955): 1. See also: "Vse sily molodezhi – na vypolnenie reshenii ianvarskogo Plenuma TsK KPSS!: Plenum Tsentral'nogo Komiteta VLKSM," *Stavropol'skaia pravda* (February 26, 1955): 1.

[19] "Boevye zadachi sel'skoi molodezhi," *Stalinets* (March 4, 1955): 1.

letter's message.[20] Soviet radio joined the wave of corn propaganda: for example, a broadcast made on the morning of February 28, 1955, announced to listeners, "[the Komsomol Central Committee's] communiqué calls on Komsomol members and all rural youth to cultivate corn, spreading it to every corner of our Motherland."[21] The audiences' reception of this message is impossible to measure, but heroes of the corngrowing competition such as Ukrainian champion corngrower A. A. Il'chenko noted its influence.[22] Large quantities of pamphlets, posters, and other materials produced by central and regional authorities also raised awareness. Compiled in June 1955, a report on the quality of "books, brochures, posters, and flyers about corn" characterized them as "simple and clear, accessible to every collective farm member and youth."[23] Authorities considered these measures useful: those who reported that a republic, oblast, or district had underachieved in growing corn often blamed the absence of or inadequacy of these measures.

The Komsomol aimed its message not only at active members, but also at every young person, setting the corn-growing competitions apart from feats such as the Virgin Lands campaign. Relocating to Siberia or Kazakhstan, participants in that campaign disrupted their lives, leaving behind education, friends, family, and an established way of life for a period of several years; some even settled permanently there.[24] By contrast, the corngrowing competition offered everyone an opportunity to contribute to a cause that required less sacrifice because, as

---

[20] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 315, l. 57.

[21] GARF, f. R-6903, op. 12, d. 296, l. 362.

[22] *XIII s"ezd Vsesoiuznogo leninskogo kommunisticheskogo Soiuza molodezhi: Stenograficheskii otchet, 14–18 aprelia 1958 g.* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo TsK VLKSM "Molodaia gvardiia," 1959), 269.

[23] RGASPI f. M-1, op. 9, d. 315, l. 10.

[24] Michaela Pohl calculates that, in addition to the 100,000 or more permanent settlers, as many as 300,000 Komsomol members and students and another 100,000–200,000 soldiers were mobilized to help harvest the wheat of the Virgin Lands during the period. Pohl, "From White Grave to Tselinograd," 276. She further notes how the youthful atmosphere of the region brought the culture of the Thaw even to the isolated outpost of Akmolinsk, which briefly became Tselinograd ("City of the Virgin Lands") in the 1960s, and has become Astana, the post-Soviet capital of independent Kazakhstan. Ibid., 296–97.

Khrushchev asserted, corn could grow in nearly any region. The Komsomol envisioned mobilizing youth already working in agriculture, as well as students and Pioneers. Soviet leaders stressed that corn was equal in importance to farming the *tselina*, as they called the Virgin Lands in Russian. As early as January 1955, Ukrainian party chief A. I. Kirichenko reasoned, "As you see, comrades, corn is our own sort of *tselina*. True, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev encouraged us to grow corn, but it is only fair to note that Comrade Khrushchev also encouraged our Kazakh and Siberian comrades."[25] At a Komsomol Central Committee meeting in 1959, an oblast Komsomol secretary declared, "Party, Komsomol, soviet, and economic organizations everywhere seek and find new reserves, new potential, and figuratively term them their '*tselina*.' For some, this is draining marshes, for others it is expanding cropland, and for still others it is designating corn their '*tselina*.'"[26] Komsomol leaders and activists repeatedly claimed, and not without reason, that they had made corn "a Komsomol crop" in much the same way that they claimed successes in the Virgin Lands as their own.

In 1955 and 1956, the Komsomol competitions typified responses to Khrushchev's reforms to decentralize the ministries and reemphasize the Communist Party's intervention in the economy. Komsomol leaders in Moscow required each oblast committee to hold a contest, reporting its results at the end of the year. Central authorities dictated the form and function, but left to the regions details such as the size and number of prizes. District, oblast, krai, and republic committees implemented the policy, dispatching accounts of the outcome to Moscow, where officials oversaw the whole. The Komsomol Central Committee's Department of Rural Youth often did little more than to send out inspectors, to reprimand those who failed in some aspect of the campaign, and to summarize the competition's results for the Central Committee. The corngrowing competitions were a practical outcome of Khrushchev's requirement that the party, and by extension the Komsomol, show initiative in directing production. Echoing

[25] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 120, l. 17.

[26] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 2, d. 388, l. 86.

Khrushchev's demands, Shelepin exhorted local officials to figuratively and literally get their hands dirty. In February 1955, he warned subordinates that superficial leadership and lax oversight of corngrowing would earn only reprimands. Without organization, education, and technical proficiency, Komsomol members' efforts would remain an empty gesture. He cautioned, "The plans should be specific. Otherwise, everything will remain on paper and become only idle blather. Regardless, the development of animal husbandry requires not plans and resolutions but action, because cattle and hogs are unable to read resolutions—they require feed."[27]

Issuing formal orders and enlisting local committees to participate, the Komsomol leaders left little room to misunderstand the campaign's urgency, especially since newspapers reiterated the message to ensure it was understood. An article in the May 5, 1955, issue of *Komsomol'skaia pravda* illustrates how authorities conveyed their expectations, in this case making the policies appear to be part of a popular initiative. Entitled "We will help raise corn!" the article was purportedly an open letter written by a group of students at a technical school in Voronezh to peers at similar institutions. The letter's tone conveys the adventure and excitement associated with the corn crusade, mimicking that used to appeal to potential participants in the Virgin Lands campaign. A draft text in the Komsomol Central Committee's files, dated April 29, 1955, suggests that Komsomol officials composed it, or at the very least edited and approved it.[28] That document diverges only slightly from the published version. The opening line, "Corn is the key to plenty," reads in the published version: "Corn is the key to increased production of grain, and to producing plenty of meat and dairy products."[29] The remainder of the paragraph reads the same, declaring corn a "miraculous" source of grain, feed, meat, and milk. Even if a group of

[27] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 2, d. 343, l. 64.

[28] The letter's title, for example, differs only slightly: "We will help raise corn everywhere!" RGASPI, f. M-1,op. 9, d. 315, ll. 36–41. For the published version, see: *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (May 5, 1955): 1.

[29] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 315, l. 36.

students in Voronezh had drafted the letter, the official approval and editing it received in Moscow converted it into an integral part of this concerted mobilization strategy.

Similarly, newspaper articles criticized practices that authorities considered ineffective, even harmful, while describing approved methods for organizing the competitions and working the cornfields. In 1955, such efforts proved necessary because corn suddenly became a priority for those who had no experience growing it; the union-wide reach of *Komsomol'skaia pravda* made it suited to the task. An article by A. Zanina, Komsomol secretary of a collective farm in Russia's Bashkir ASSR, describes a trial attempt in 1954 to grow corn. Shedding light on approved methods, it outlines how to cultivate corn, organize work teams, and hold a competition, all measures that supposedly guaranteed positive results. It exemplifies the way articles commented on an individual or a group to call attention to a common problem. Pointing to needed improvements, Zanina described how at an oblast conference, "The activists sharply criticized the oblast Komsomol committee because they had neglected to guide the young corngrowers." In light of the new contest for 1955, Zanina wrote, "hopefully past mistakes, which left the competition only on paper, will not be repeated."[30]

The competitions typically began with a challenge by the Komsomol members of a farm, but the responsible oblast and republic Komsomol committees closely managed this initiative. Committees had to meet expectations for organizing, which they could demonstrate by presenting data to officials in Moscow on the number of participants, hectares cultivated, and tons of corn harvested. The Azerbaijan Komsomol committee's account is typical of the reports local authorities sent to the Central Committee. It opens by quantifying the republic Komsomol's "active engagement": 6,000 participants cultivated 37,625 hectares, more than half of the republic's total of 70,000 hectares. The committee stressed that initiative had come from the district and farm committees, although this frequently was actually a response to prompting from superiors: "The Komsomol members and youth of Belokan district challenged others in the

[30] A. Zanina, "'Gost'ia' stanovitsia khoziaikoi," *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (May 7, 1955): 2.

republic to join the socialist competition to grow 10 metric tons of grain and between 80 and 90 tons of green fodder [used to feed cattle] per hectare."[31] The competition had achieved its goals, the committee claimed, based on the support of the republic Komsomol committees, which ensured "real success in this patriotic task."[32]

Apparent popular initiative also fueled programs involving Pioneers, groups of schoolchildren too young for Komsomol membership. One campaign trumpeted the challenge made by a group of schoolchildren in Leningrad oblast.[33] Including a wider cross-section of youth than the Komsomol, Pioneer *druzhiny*, or troops, worked to grow corn from Stavropol krai in the south to Kirov and Moscow oblasts in the north. In April 1955, the Komsomol committee of Russia's Arzamas oblast,[34] for instance, reported that it had partnered with the local department of education to organize the endeavor. "Schoolchildren in nearly every district willingly help the collective farms grow corn," the committee reported with pleasure.[35] Other oblast committees indicated that large groups of children, guided by responsible adults and led by peers, promised to grow plots of corn up to a few hectares in size. An award-winning detachment (*otriad*) from the Grinev school in Belarus's Brest oblast comprised Pioneers from the seventh grade, approximately fourteen years old, who worked a plot of only one hectare.[36]

The Komsomol expected local officials to exhibit hands-on leadership, and often chastised individuals and local committees unwilling to do so. A Komsomol Central Committee inspector sent to Belarus's Gomel oblast found that the competition in one district "proceeded in lifeless fashion." The local committee's lack of initiative caused youth to participate

---

[31] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 352, l. 34.

[32] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 352, l. 36.

[33] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 315, l. 73.

[34] Long part of Gorky oblast (today's Nizhnyi Novgorod), Arzamas served as center of its own oblast from 1954 to 1957.

[35] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 37.

[36] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 415, l. 195.

unenthusiastically in tending corn plantings. In one common inducement, a district or oblast committee offered a pennant, or "*vympel*," as a trophy to the work team that completed planting, cultivating, and harvesting more quickly and effectively than the rest. Receiving this praise, such work teams served as examples to the rest, much like "vanguard workers." In Belarus's Gomel oblast, however, district Komsomol authorities acted only when the oblast committee demanded a progress report.[37] By contrast, the Komsomol secretary of Russia's Kaluga oblast extolled one of his oblast's district committees in nominating it for a prize, writing, "Exhibiting leadership in practical ways, [the committee] regularly tallied the results of the competition between links and sponsored articles in the district newspaper by work team leaders with the goal of broadcasting exemplary practices." The district's Komsomol leader, V. Sazanov, "played a major role by often visiting the work teams and offering them practical assistance."[38]

These actions offered a portrait of an ideal committee and Komsomol leader. In keeping with the model of leadership Khrushchev championed, hardworking and disciplined leaders needed knowledge about production and had to educate workers about it. Inspectors from Moscow identified oblast secretaries and other personnel who possessed these qualities, and noted those who lacked them. An official sent to the Mari ASSR in European Russia described the many successes and a few failures of the oblast's organization. She saved her fiercest condemnation, however, for the oblast Komsomol secretary. He poorly understands the state of affairs in the oblast," she charged. "In the past five months, he has not taken a trip (*komandirovka*) to assess any district." Failing to live up to the ideal of hands-on management, his work lacked "efficiency and a businesslike manner (*delovitost'*)" as well as "creativity and imagination (*tvorchestvo*)." Because he failed "to delve deeply into the issues, he often could not

[37] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 352, l. 64.

[38] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 352, l. 124.

clearly express his own opinion."[39] Expecting these qualities from subordinates, authorities praised them in outstanding activists, those that carried out the corn crusade while fulfilling other vital Komsomol missions, including educating youth to be better citizens, and combatting drunkenness, theft, rudeness, and similar ailments.

To encourage this leadership model, the Komsomol inspected oblast committees and reprimanded the leaders of those that failed to meet these expectations. The Komsomol valued this oversight mission, and admonished those who failed to carry through the organization's dual mandate to educate youth in communist values and to supervise their labor. Detailing their efforts, the leaders of the Latvian Komsomol committee contended that this latter task required exceptional effort because corn was new to the republic's farms. They therefore had to "regularly inspect (*kontrolirovat'*) the Komsomol organizations' contributions to corn cultivation. To that end, during its meetings, the bureau heard reports by district and farm Komsomol secretaries."[40] Monitoring subordinates furthermore entailed observing work directly, ensuring that necessary efforts did not remain merely "on paper." A Komsomol Central Committee inspector on assignment in Russia's Ivanovo oblast concluded, "The Komsomol regional committee weakly oversaw the district committees and primary organizations." He wrote that the committee knew only the total of work teams organized, but not the number of hectares of corn they grew. Worse still, some farms had no Komsomol work teams at all. For example, in the oblast's Sokol district, he found them only on seventeen of the thirty-two collective farms. Even where youth had been organized to grow corn, their exceedingly modest responsibilities barely matched the number of hectares children were expected to tend. On the Chapaev collective farm, the Komsomol work team tended a three-hectare field, while the local students had pledged to cultivate the same area.[41] Coming to light only when outside inspectors arrived,

---

[39] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, ll. 71–73.

[40] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 66.

[41] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 39.

these situations cast the regional committee in a poor light: it had either knowingly allowed them to happen, or failed to discover them in the course of its own inspections.

The report about Ivanovo oblast is representative of typical external "criticism," but each committee also had to engage in "self-criticism" by describing failures and steps to remedy them. This expectation remained consistent: the bulk of any given document a Komsomol committee sent to its superiors conveyed quantitative data, backed by specific examples, demonstrating the value of the directive or campaign in question. Contrasting evidence of any "shortcomings," as committees invariably termed them, remained confined to a smaller space at the end of the document. Two reports on Russia's Kalinin oblast illustrate this practice.[42] In early June 1955, the Komsomol Central Committee's inspector outlined widespread obstacles to growing corn, previously rare in the oblast. The oblast committee had acted "formalistically," meaning that it had not organized an effective response to the campaign. Officials had instead merely created a predetermined number of work teams and done little to educate the members about corn, and therefore the teams had lacked the support to succeed in planting and cultivating corn.[43] The oblast committee's defense characterized the situation as still imperfect, but improving. Following the standard format, the committee praised better districts, while acknowledging that others had little to show for their efforts. Several of them had "weakly mobilized youth for the struggle to achieve high yields of corn," while others had allowed the "collapse" of work teams that had formed. Still other districts had failed to account for their activities at all, leaving the regional committee only "to note a lack of discipline in reporting."[44] The oblast committee frankly admitted problems because the Central Committee already knew of corn's poor showing, but it nonetheless used the standard format balancing negative and positive results.

---

[42] Since 1991, the region has reverted to its prerevolutionary name, Tver'.

[43] RGASPI f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 52.

[44] RGASPI f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 59.

Oblast committees also complained about district officials who apparently ignored their orders. In December 1955, the Saratov oblast committee relayed to Moscow the expected information characterizing the results of the year's competition. It also bemoaned subordinates who did not properly hold the corngrowing contest or, in some cases, failed to transmit any results at all. Instead, they "formalistically approached the implementation of the oblast Komsomol committee's directives."[45] The oblast committee thus shifted blame to the districts, avoiding the conclusion that they should have more vigorously carried out its mission to oversee them.

Komsomol Central Committee officials in Moscow required not merely the outward appearance that a competition took place, but also substantive evidence of it, the absence of which brought about charges of "formalism." The Department of Rural Youth often leveled that accusation when it summarized results for the Central Committee's secretaries, suggesting that the common problem caused leaders considerable concern. In April 1955, the department praised a few oblasts and republics that had organized widespread participation, but condemned others for failing to use propaganda or organize effectively. "A host of regional committees," it explained, "unsatisfactorily implement the resolutions of the Komsomol Central Committee plenum [of February 1955] . . . by formalistically creating work teams." For example, the department's report singled out Velikie Luki oblast,[46] in Russia's northwest where corn was a new crop, for organizing a total of only 300 work teams on the more than 1,000 farms in the region. Moreover, officials there did not verify that work teams pledged themselves to grow large plots of corn.[47] An inspector sent to Moscow oblast's Lotoshinsk district found an equally sorry state of affairs. Among his strongest charges was that the district committee had undertaken the

[45] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 93

[46] Today a city in Pskov oblast, Velikie Luki was from 1944 to 1957 the center of its oblast, carved from parts of Kalinin, Pskov, and Smolensk oblasts.

[47] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 315, l. 48.

formation of work teams "in a formalistic fashion."[48] Six weeks after the Komsomol launched its corngrowing campaign, the district committee had formed only eighteen work teams, gave them inadequate support, and assigned them insufficient numbers of workers. A resulting meeting of the district committee condemned the poor organization of production and gave orders to strengthen collective farm Komsomol organizations in the district by reassigning 120 members to them.[49] In Ivanovo oblast's Sokol district, the failure to organize teams on more than seventeen of the thirty-two collective farms was compounded by the fact that those "existed formally, on paper alone." The oblast committee had neither organized the corngrowing contest nor investigated progress "on the ground."[50]

Once republic and oblast committees had established a competition, the Central Committee also expected them to publicize its existence and the rules, a tool for influencing youth to participate documents often called "*glasnost'*." In this context, the term meant that the press, lectures, meetings, and similar methods disseminated knowledge about corn and the competition. For example, the Komsomol Central Committee's letter published in 1955 required that each committee sponsor meetings about the Komsomol's directives on the competition. The bureau of Russia's Belgorod oblast committee obliged its subordinates to meet and discuss the campaign, "to encourage extensive *glasnost* in the competition."[51] This stipulation remained operative in subsequent years, when the Central Committee continued to use the term in a similar manner: for instance, its directive on the guidelines for the 1958 competition called for "extensive *glasnost'*." An inspector sent from Moscow to Ukraine's Dnipropetrovs'k oblast condemned the local committee's "serious shortcomings," as a result of which, "many work teams of Sinel'kov, Dnepropetrovsk, and many other districts do not know the competition

[48] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 77.

[49] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 84.

[50] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 77.

[51] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 315, l. 20.

rules."[52] In Russia's Penza oblast, "a few bureau members tally the results without inviting participants or Komsomol activists. They tally the results formalistically, without a deep analysis of the work of each work team. There is no *glasnost'*."[53]

Episodes such as these illustrate the obstacles blocking smooth transmission of orders in the Komsomol hierarchy, making it similar to the party and the government. Reports that catalogued failures help outline the expectations local authorities faced in organizing the corngrowing contests. This ideal paralleled the growing role of the Communist Party in managing production, especially agriculture. The competitions, alongside the Virgin Lands campaign, demonstrate renewed efforts to raise the Komsomol's profile in the press, encouraging youth to join projects that authorities envisioned would define a generation. For Komsomol officials, the campaigns ensured that they would not neglect their duty to involve Komsomol members, Pioneers, and youth in corngrowing.

* * *

Although they shed light on expectations and failures, official reports provide little insight into the participants and their motivations. Leaders' speeches, newspaper accounts, and related sources portray officially acceptable ones. For some, the prospect of winning praise and awards for themselves and the collectivities to which they belonged offered sufficient incentive. The material rewards, the youthful enthusiasm of a younger generation, and the attraction of social bonding may explain why others joined "the struggle for high yields of corn."

Young participants emphasized that growing corn was their contribution to the Soviet project. To achieve success, they had to test the status quo, embodied in the authority of collective farmers, farm managers, and local authorities that scoffed at the possibility that a crop so strange as corn might actually grow. Speaking to a youth conference in Belarus, the leader of

[52] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 386, l. 100.

[53] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 456, l. 11.

a work team on the Dzerzhinskii collective farm in Gomel oblast recalled, "When we began to plant corn, [local leaders] didn't pay attention to us, or they laughed at us. But we wanted to prove that, regardless of it all, even in imperfect climatic conditions, corn could grow."[54] Located in southeastern Belarus, Gomel oblast was 200–300 kilometers north of the traditional range of corn cultivation, but better suited than many regions where Khrushchev's crusade introduced corn. The Komsomol committee secretary on the Karl Marx farm in the same oblast similarly recounted the response to the Komsomol's call to arms: "I remember the meeting where collective farmers deliberated over preparations for the spring planting. It was difficult to prove to them that the crop could grow on our farm, in the conditions and soils of our region." The secretary continued, "Even the collective farm's management doubted the chances for success. And thus, to prove that corn could grow on our collective farm all the same, the Komsomol members decided to aid in the task" by creating ten work teams assigned to grow corn.[55]

In 1955 and 1956, each oblast and republic set rules and distributed awards; in subsequent years, these became part of an All-Union Corn-Growing Competition [*Vsesoiuznoe sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie komsomol'tsev i molodezhi za vyrashchivanie vysokikh urozhaev kukuruzy*] first co-sponsored by the Komsomol and the USSR Ministry of Agriculture in 1957. The contest's rules set a yield per hectare of grain or silage, which varied according to climatic region, required to win a second place or a first, which offered substantial rewards. For oblast and district Komsomol officials, winning earned a bonus equaling one month's pay. The committee received an automobile (for first prize) or motorcycle (for second prize) for official use. A farm's Komsomol organization might win a radio, a set of musical instruments, or an assortment of sporting equipment for its members' use. Outstanding individuals, typically work team leaders, received an all-expenses-paid trip to Moscow to visit the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition [*Vsesoiuznaia sel'skokhoziaistvennaia vystavka*, or VSKhV; in 1959, it became the

[54] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 352, l. 64.

[55] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 352, l. 45.

Exhibition of the Achievements of the National Economy, or VDNKh].[56] Other prizes included wristwatches and cash payments. These prizes augmented the moral incentives that encouraged participants to consider themselves a part of a larger project and to embody socialist virtues. Recognition spurred them too, by offering, for example, 1,000 outstanding corngrowers an invitation to a Conference of Youth Corngrowers in Moscow that, in addition to the honor of selection, awarded them a paid visit to the USSR's capital, a trip perhaps difficult for a typical rural young person to imagine. The total annual budget for prizes surpassed 1 million rubles, mostly in the form of goods and bonus payments, which came from joint funding provided by the Komsomol and the Ministry of Agriculture.[57] This amounted to a mere .0009 percent of the official budget of 112 billion rubles for the union-level government, and even less if the 127-billion–ruble combined budget of the union republics is included.[58] Nonetheless, this small sum represented substantial material benefit to the winners.

Outstanding Pioneers, like their counterparts in the Komsomol, could also win prizes. First awarded by oblast Komsomol committees, the Central Committee distributed them according to the all-union competition criteria beginning in 1957. For example, among the Pioneer troop from the aforementioned Grinev school in Belarus, three members who proved "especially outstanding" in their duties growing corn won trips to Moscow, where they attended the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition. Still others won a visit to one of the country's most prestigious Pioneer summer camps, such as "Artek," on the Black Sea coast in Crimea, or a year's subscription to *Pioneerskaia pravda*, the organization's newspaper.

---

[56] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 382, ll. 2–3 and f. M-1, op. 9, d. 414, ll. 4–7.

[57] At the official exchange rate and adjusted for inflation to 2013, this figure equals some $33 million. In 1957, the total came to 1.295 million rubles. A budget listed costs for each prize: an automobile (12,800 rubles); a motorcycle (5,500); two models of radio (1,000 and 405); sporting equipment (1,000); musical instruments (1,000); wristwatches (500 or 400); trips to VSKhV (1,000); and trips to "Artek," the Pioneer summer camp (600). RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 382, l. 26. In 1958, the total budget rose to 1.58 million rubles for prizes, plus an additional 200,000 rubles for paying bonuses to the local organization workers. RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 414, l. 31.

[58] "Zakon o Gosudarstvennom biudzhete Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh respublik na 1955 god," *Pravda* (February 11, 1955): 2.

Komsomol committees doled out nonmonetary rewards, such as banners, pins, and certificates, much as the party did to adult workers. In promoting the competition, the committees constantly appealed to patriotism, to the ideals of socialism, and to pride in the organization's long history of achievements accumulated through the activism of generations of youth. In the corn-growing competitions, these awards supplemented material rewards by being more widespread, even if they achieved a lesser effect. Many earned an award and accompanying lapel pin, or *znachok*, proclaiming: "For Raising High Yields of Corn." For work teams, brigades, farms, and districts, travelling trophies in the form of a banner (*perekhodiashchie znam'ia*) signified to passersby a successful collective effort to grow corn. Others, such as the Ukrainian youth A. A. Il'chenko, won the highest award, a designation as a Hero of Socialist Labor.

The story of Il'chenko illustrates the forces that motivated those who participated in these competitions, even if the recognition she achieved made her story far from typical. Success in corngrowing brought Il'chenko from Ukraine to Moscow in April 1958 for the Komsomol's Thirteenth Congress, giving her the rare opportunity to speak before the highest ceremonial gathering of youth leaders. She declared, "From this podium, I want to thank the party for its care for us, the young collective farmers. In the name of all the girls in my work team, in the name of the collective farmers of Cherkasy, allow me to thank Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev for teaching us to love and to raise a crop as valuable as corn."[59] Il'chenko's brief speech illustrated the Komsomol's mission with events from her life on a collective farm. She described the labor and daily life of her work team members, nine young women of Komsomol age. Having finished high school, they faced a choice: to remain and work on the collective farm or to leave their home village in search of education and work in the cities, as so many of their peers did. Il'chenko recalled that they were told, "Don't stay on the collective farm or you'll never get married!" Having dedicated themselves to work on the farm, however, she and her peers proved

[59] *XIII s"ezd Vsesoiuznogo leninskogo kommunisticheskogo Soiuza molodezhi*, 269.

that admonishment wrong. She and her friends acquired a technical education and found suitable husbands in a rural community short on eligible bachelors. The young women, now valued farmworkers, married "not drunks, but tractor-drivers, agronomists, and combine-drivers," which is to say, men with skills and prospects.[60] Most importantly, however, they had mastered how to grow corn. In fact, in 1957 Il'chenko had become a Hero of Socialist Labor.[61] This opened to her the path to party membership, awards, and prizes. She found herself on the podium because she was an exemplary leader of her local Komsomol group, and a winner of the annual corn-growing contests.

Il'chenko's carefully choreographed speech also worked to popularize the competitions by reaching not only regional audiences, but those across the Soviet Union. In her speech, Il'chenko described her work team's goals for 1958: to grow thirteen metric tons of grain per hectare, several times more than the average yield. After Il'chenko quit the podium, Komsomol first secretary V. E. Semichastnyi read to the audience a note from a challenger, A. Muntian, leader of a Komsomol work team in the Moldavian SSR who promised to raise 13.5 tons per hectare.[62] The contest between the two young women to measure whose work team would grow more corn illustrated on a small scale the much larger one among districts, regions, and republics.

As Il'chenko's story suggests, the Komsomol voiced concern for youth as farmworkers, but also for their way of life. She embodied an ideal in which young women equally pursued

---

[60] Ibid., 270. She described a Ukrainian tradition allowing a young woman to give a pumpkin to a hopeful suitor she chose to reject. "For that reason, we plant them around our corn field between the rows. The first year we gave out several to the local loafers. Then we decided that this was a waste of pumpkins, and instead gave them to the collective farm cows so as to produce more milk." She also recited a brief verse in Ukrainian:

My v mizhriaddiakh kukurudza	In between the rows of corn,
Nasadili garbuziv.	We planted pumpkins.
Garbuzi dlia kormu, druzi,	Pumpkins for feed, friends,
A ishche . . . [sic] dlia zhinikhiv.	And yet . . . [nothing] for the suitors.

[61] RGASPI, M-1, op. 9, d. 398, l. 11.

[62] *XIII s"ezd Vsesoiuznogo leninskogo kommunisticheskogo Soiuza molodezhi*, 273.

education, skills, and a suitable husband. Similarly, accounts of the Komsomol competition sometimes commented on the participants' way of life, as well as local Komsomol committees' efforts to guide them or, should the worst happen, to police them. In contrast to those who demonstrated "discipline" and "industriousness," some instead "embezzled collective farm resources." Local Komsomol committees, such as the one on the Krupskaia collective in Belarus's Minsk oblast, established "posts" designed to keep watch over communal property and behavior, owing to individuals who worked poorly, who were lazy and rude, or who were drunkards and thieves. The surveillance made malefactors "afraid not only of Komsomol activists, but of rank-and-file youth." Those youth leaders "struggled" against poor labor discipline and "Komsomol members' amoral conduct, and with hooliganism and profanity."[63] Furthering the mission to educate members, Komsomol activists in the Moldavian SSR worked conscientiously, but also studied political events and engaged in "cultured leisure," a term denoting approved recreational activities such as drawing, reading classics or political tracts, or playing team sports.[64]

The Komsomol's corn-growing competitions achieved at least partial success, especially in comparison with related methods used both in corngrowing and in other aspects of agricultural and industrial production. In one, an individual, group, farm, district, or oblast identified an "obligation," a targeted level of production above the assignment they received in the plan. While common, these pledges seem to have fallen by the wayside once actual work got underway. Although the vanguard workers who received fulsome praise in the press always fulfilled their obligations, there seems to have been little incentive for the rank-and-file collective farmer or work team, lacking the publicity that followed those chosen few, to do so. Similarly, competitions "in honor" of some upcoming Central Committee plenum or congress of

[63] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 307, ll. 3–4.

[64] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 307, l. 32.

the Communist Party or the Komsomol occurred with similar frequency.[65] These appeals to moral incentives appear to have been considered a burden that workers had to formulaically take on, but which they could quickly forget. For instance, the Saratov oblast Komsomol committee "accepted elevated obligations and carried out major organizational work on the mobilization of youth for their fulfillment." The Saratov committee's report to the Central Committee offers tallies of participants—400 work brigades, 1800 teams operating combines, 2094 corn-growing links, and more.[66] However, the document provides little sense that the actual production these workers achieved was of equal concern. Other oblast committees sent similar numbers to Moscow, but bemoaned the fact that district committees had failed to make the most of these efforts. In 1959, the Komsomol committee for North Ossetia ASSR decried "serious shortcomings . . . in mobilizing youth to fulfill their socialist obligations." For example, the Komsomol members on several collective farms "had outlined specific tasks and named substantial obligations, but those did not serve as a plan for actual work." As a result, the districts had met their obligations in only two cases.[67] Heightened enthusiasm and organized agitation, in the end, did not translate into increased production.

* * *

Despite the prevalence of charges of *pripiski* (adding fictive production to statistical reports) and *ochkovtiratel'stvo* (fraud) in Soviet agriculture in the late 1950s, these phenomena apparently were rare in the Komsomol corngrowing contests. Although evidence of systematic falsifications is common in the archival records of the Central Committee of the Communist

---

[65] See, for instance, the campaign preceding the Twenty-second Party Congress. Months before the congress, *Pravda* featured editorials calling for an "nationwide competition," and banners accompanying high-profile pledges to grow cotton, hew coal, harvest corn, and more. See, for instance, "Vsenarodnoe sorevnovanie," *Pravda* (September 15, 1958): 1. The edition of October 13 featured a story about efforts to complete the harvest of corn grain in Rostov oblast. "Massovyi voskresnik po uborke kukuruzy," *Pravda* (October 13, 1958): 1.

[66] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 445, l. 35.

[67] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 445, l. 104.

Party, there is little evidence of equal levels of dishonesty in the Komsomol Central Committee records. Those isolated incidents that did occur, however, illustrate the actions expected of a district Komsomol secretary, and the consequences of deceit. The Central Committee of the Komsomol of Kyrgyzstan, for example, disclosed to superiors in Moscow that it had punished a district secretary in Jalalabat oblast (Kyrgyz, in Russian: *Dzhalal-Abad*) for "deception and fraud." In March 1955, he had informed superiors that his committee had organized twenty-nine work teams. The bureau of the republic Central Committee subsequently concluded that in fact he had done nothing. Although they did not remove him from the post, they issued a reprimand that counted as a strike against his outlook for education or advancement in the Komsomol.[68]

In 1960, the North Ossetia ASSR Komsomol committee nominated a local corngrower for a prize, one of the few documented cases of deception in the corngrowing competitions. This type of fraud likely occurred more than once, but authorities' extensive inspections apparently uncovered such episodes infrequently. After 1959, when cheating on statistics reached its height in the Riazan affair and related scandals, the Komsomol conducted reciprocal inspections among farm, district, and oblast competitors that might well have exposed fraud, but did not. As this case demonstrates on the rare occasions when they discovered trickery, the perpetrators earned reprimands, although not expulsion from the Komsomol. These facts suggest that the Komsomol competitions were comparatively free of outright falsification.

In this case, a certain B. Kisiev led the work team that won first prize by growing the highest yield in North Ossetia. The personnel evaluation of him, or *kharakteristika*, the oblast committee transmitted to Moscow noted information common to hundreds of standardized reports in the files: his age, Komsomol membership, and leadership qualities. An attestation such as this one might have proven valuable at some later date, such as when seeking admission to an institution of higher education. The document featured the results Kisiev and his work team achieved: its ten members had tended ninety hectares of corn, surpassing their obligation

[68] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 316, l. 62 and subsequent un-numbered page.

of seven metric tons per hectare by growing seventeen tons.[69] In January 1961, however, the oblast committee recanted in an "explanatory note," a document required when making an admission to a superior or an inspector. Despite multiple attestations signed by the proper officials, further investigation had discovered a total not of 17, but of 13.2 tons. The note does not reveal how the incorrect information had passed through the oblast Komsomol committee. The circumstances suggest that the separate groups of farm and Komsomol officials responsible for verifying the results had colluded to sign errant documentation, turning with the stroke of a pen an impressive yield into a record-breaking one. The North Ossetia Komsomol committee recognized "the complete responsibility of the oblast Komsomol committee for the mistake," and that "the bureau held a serious discussion about it." The infraction's magnitude meant that the oblast Komsomol officials assured superiors in Moscow that they "had taken measures so that such an incident would not be permitted."[70]

The gravity of such infractions is clear in another case unrelated to the corngrowing competitions. In 1960, the Komsomol undertook a campaign to have members compete to raise livestock. Accounting irregularities soon became evident: some competitors worked to "finish" hogs: that is, to confine and feed the animals a high-calorie diet, including a ration of corn, for a brief period prior to slaughter, adding weight and resulting in pork valued for uses such as bacon. A summary sent to the Komsomol Central Committee dryly notes, "Some organizations reported incorrect data for the first two quarters." The committees of Astrakhan, Orenburg, Orel, Tiumen, Cheliabinsk, and Yaroslavl oblasts and Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkariia ASSRs each asserted that Komsomol members were finishing numbers of hogs in excess of those the records of the Ministry of Agriculture registered for the entire oblast. The committees had lied, an "irresponsible" practice rendering it "necessary to strengthen oversight for the fulfillment of

[69] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 505, l, 98.

[70] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 505, l. 154.

declared obligations."[71]

* * *

The corngrowing competitions evolved over the Khrushchev period, conforming to the ethos of participatory governance characteristic of the early 1960s. Moreover, the competitions expanded their scope: in the early 1960s, the RSFSR held a competition for mechanized corngrowing teams—the type exemplified by N. F. Manukovskii and A. V. Gitalov—of adults too old for Komsomol membership, suggesting that the authorities viewed them as an effective model worth applying widely.

Expanding the competitions to all corngrowers was among the measures reported to Moscow in May 1961 by the party leaders of Russia's Kabardino-Balkariia ASSR. The oblast secretary lauded the success of socialist competition in incentivizing workers "to fulfill their duties in cultivating high yields of corn" and of a commission established to monitor it. Like the Komsomol contest, each phase of the competition measured which work team, brigade, collective farm, and district could plow, plant, cultivate, and harvest its corn both quickly and effectively. For this, each group's leaders earned material rewards such as prizes ("*material'noe pooshchrenie*"), as well as moral ones including a pin naming them "superior corngrower of the Kabardino-Balkariia ASSR" and a place on the republic's "*doska pocheta*," or a public honor roll of outstanding workers. "The most important" measure for mobilizing workers, however, was the "corngrowers day" held annually in the republic's capital by the republic's party and government leaders to fête those "who achieved the highest targets in socialist competition."[72]

The post-1960 evolution of the Komsomol corngrowing contests mirrored changes in ideology of the time, while permitting Komsomol authorities to address concerns prevalent in the competitions of earlier years. The committees moved to put them on "a social basis," to use

[71] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 483, ll. 35–36.

[72] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 14, d. 185, l. 49.

the Soviet terminology: they established district, oblast, and interoblast "Soviets of Young Corngrowers" (*Sovety molodykh kukuruzovodov*) to administer them, supplanting administration by the Komsomol. The soviets united oblast, district, and farm Komsomol leaders to adjudicate the process and organize "social inspectors" to carry out "mutual inspection" among the competitors. These measures replaced a single Komsomol official, who might occasionally inspect fields, with a whole group of competitors from a neighboring farm, district, or oblast. More numerous, the groups had little incentive to turn a blind eye to "shortcomings," as officials often did. The move illustrates the characteristic emphasis on activism that began in the late 1950s. Seeking to improve governance and economic efficiency, Khrushchev promoted measures replacing, at least on paper, state administrators with volunteers. His ideological formula announced that the Soviet Union was becoming a "state of all the people" (*vsenarodnoe gosudarstvo*), reinforcing the idea that it was in the process of "constructing communism." In the absence of class conflict under socialism and the imminent arrival of communism, political and administrative functions were to devolve to nonprofessional groups. State bureaucratic structures, which Stalin had relentlessly strengthened, would begin to wither away as Marx and Lenin had promised. Each citizen would therefore have a stake in improving economic and legal systems.

The corngrowing contests demonstrate the model's limitations: ostensibly independent "social" institutions earmarked leadership positions for the same individuals making up the Communist Party and Komsomol apparatuses. They therefore continued to respond to the demands of party and state, producing changes in form, but only small differences in practice. Nominally a social organization but in fact an integral part of the party-state complex, the Komsomol thus actively worked to realize Khrushchev's ideological formulation. Standard terminology called this "the reconstruction of agricultural leadership by developing democratic

forms of management."[73] Lasting until 1964, the soviets ensured that agricultural officials, Komsomol officials, Komsomol members, and rank-and-file production workers judged the prizewinners.

In the late 1950s, the advent of "social inspectors" who verified the contests' results and the quality of competitors' work represented a first step toward expanded participation. This move predated the Soviets of Young Corngrowers, but itself drew on earlier precedents. Official descriptions and press accounts emphasize their "social," or "public" (*obshchestvennyi*) character, meaning that they consisted of a mix of Komsomol officials, rank-and-file members, agricultural specialists, and agricultural laborers. The press, in turn, publicized their efforts as a prompt to form them in other oblasts and districts. In 1958, groups called "light cavalry" (*legkaia kavaleriia*) conducted inspection "raids" in growing numbers, although they had Stalin-era roots.[74] In May 1958, the Komsomol newspaper of Stavropol krai, *Molodoi leninets*, published a message from the krai Komsomol committee that sheds light on these raids. Its short, punchy sentences, printed entirely in capital letters mirrored the format of government telegrams. "*Calling the attention*," of city and district "*commands*" (the Russian "*shtab*" mimics military terminology) to "*agricultural laborers' pressing tasks*," the telegram required detachments of light cavalry to gauge progress in sheep shearing, a major part of the krai's economy, as well as preparations of feed supplies, for the grain harvest, and "*the careful cultivation of corn*." The telegram ordered local detachments "*to establish Komsomol inspection posts* (kontrol'nye posty) *in crucial places, using various forms of public oversight* (obshchestvennyi kontrol') *to uncover shortcomings, rapidly remedy them, and report on raids*

[73] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 598, l. 2.

[74] For example, an account from Sakhalin region from 1956 reports that some of the units in that region had been active ten years prior. RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 823, l. 6. References can be found in the 1930s as well, such as a speech from a meeting of the Party Control Commission of the Central Committee, the era's oversight bureaucracy. See: "'Legkaia kavaleriia' – shkola gosudarstvennogo obucheniia: Iz doklada sekretaria TsK VLKSM tov. Kosareva," *Pravda* (July 3, 1934): 3.

to the krai light cavalry command for publication in Molodoi leninets (emphasis in original)."[75] Regional and district Komsomol committees, moreover, described the raids and their purpose in similar terms.[76]

This apparent activism acquired its primary form in the Soviets of Young Corngrowers, which proliferated in 1961. Like the forerunner "light cavalry" raids, the soviets were generally under the direction of Komsomol leaders, with members also drawn from activists, farmworkers, and specialists. They attempted to improve the competitions' power to incentivize youth to participate and grow large harvests, especially by expanding "mutual inspections" (*vzaimoproverki*). These investigations differed from the earlier "raids," however, by putting competitors in charge of governing themselves. Work teams traveled to inspect neighboring work teams, districts to neighboring districts, and oblasts to neighboring oblasts. Speakers at the Komsomol Central Committee plenum in June 1961 signaled that the new program was a priority, and described how the soviets should function. The secretary of the Komsomol committee in the Krasnodar krai described the work to "render practical aid" to work teams. The soviets, furthermore, "directed socialist competition" by educating their charges and cooperating with their counterpart Komsomol committees.[77] The krai's Timashev district demonstrated how to succeed: members of the soviet themselves worked and carried out inspection raids. They had additionally organized a district-wide "*voskresnik*," or voluntary day of work on Sunday, normally a day off, to complete a time-sensitive job. The secretary thus offered guidelines for how the soviets should function. Similarly, the head of the Belarus Komsomol described how the soviets and their raids, encompassing some 6,000 officials and activists, had brought new information to light and revealed "many examples of Komsomol committees' unsatisfactory aid

---

[75] "Vsem raikomam i gorkomam VLKSM, vsem shtabam 'Legkoi kavalerii,'" *Molodoi leninets* (May 30, 1958), 1.

[76] See, for instance: GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1215, l. 318 and GANISK, f. 63, op. 2, d. 1237, l. 4.

[77] RGASPI f. M-1, op. 2, d. 416, l. 128.

to corngrowers."[78] In Krasnodar krai, moreover, Komsomol-led "oversight posts and social inspectors" put 2,000 specialists, vanguard workers, and other activists in the fields to carry out the mutual inspections among the districts.[79] Only this kind of "mass-political work" ensured that the "fighters on the corn front" (*boitsy kukuruznogo fronta*) received the support they required.[80]

The oblast and interoblast soviets were subordinate to the Komsomol Central Committee and its Department for Rural Youth. Although most submitted only brief minutes of their meetings, a few provided stenographers' recordings of meetings and documents describing the winning teams, districts, and oblasts.[81] The interoblast soviets gathered, condensed, and passed on much of the same information that the Komsomol Central Committee had gathered for itself between 1955 and 1960. In theory, they adapted and responded to individuals with greater ease than the established bureaucracy. Their members were more likely to be active in the districts, on the farms, in the fields, representing a variety of professions and positions. The interoblast soviet for the RSFSR's central black-earth zone, for example, agreed that the constituent oblasts' delegations, while headed by the oblast Komsomol secretary, should also encompass district officials and at least one rank-and-file farmworker.[82] Regardless, Komsomol officials filled all leadership positions, meaning that the soviets remained firmly under the youth organization's control.

The soviets relied heavily on "mutual inspections" among the constituent oblasts, as well as among districts within oblasts, and even among farms within a district. For instance, the Krasnoiarsk krai agricultural department's representative to the interoblast soviet praised this

---

[78] RGASPI f. M-1, op. 2, d. 416, l. 99.

[79] RGASPI f. M-1, op. 2, d. 416, l. 129.

[80] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 2, d. 414, l. 136.

[81] The most extensive record is that for 1961 of the RSFSR's central-black-earth zone, encompassing Voronezh, Orel, Belgorod, Tambov, Kursk, Lipetsk, and Voronezh regions. RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 547.

[82] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 547, l. 2.

measure by noting that they had "revealed the state of matters, aided in thoroughly explaining the work, and proven themselves impartial judges."[83] This praise tacitly suggests that earlier methods, by which the Komsomol had administered the corngrowing competitions directly, had not achieved those goals. Mutual inspections in theory guaranteed that districts and farms did not simply report a satisfactory situation regardless of actual conditions. They put more observers on the ground than the Komsomol could dispatch on its own. Moreover, an outside observer had less incentive to accept conditions as they were or to allow individuals and groups to do as they had always done. The circular scheme of inspections relied on the fact that competitors did not have any incentive to turn a blind eye on their neighbors' failures because their neighbors would do the same for them. Instead, one oblast inspected a second, the second oblast's inspectors visited a third, and so on. To illustrate, in the central black-earth zone in 1961, the Voronezh oblast's inspectors traveled to Belgorod oblast, the inspectors of which traveled to Kursk oblast; the Kursk oblast inspectors examined work in Briansk oblast, and so on through Orel, Lipetsk, Tambov, and back to Voronezh oblast.[84]

The Komsomol Central Committee's Department of Rural Youth similarly praised the soviets. Considering Khrushchev's 1962 reforms that reshuffled local Communist Party and agricultural bureaucracies, the department recommended that, since the soviets had made substantial contributions, they should continue to function. It proposed adapting them to the newly formed territorial production administrations, which replaced the former rural districts with larger administrative units.[85] In 1962, the Komsomol Central Committee bureau noted that the soviets had organized the 90,000 work teams and their members had cultivated 18 million hectares of corn.[86] The oblast, republic, and local soviets were designed to discover and correct

[83] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, f. 546, l. 171.

[84] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 546, l. 7.

[85] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 587, l. 28

[86] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 587, l. 123.

improper practices in corngrowing, but failures to use recommended methods remained widespread. For instance, the Central Committee charged that the Komsomol committees of Turkmenistan "had set adrift the work of the councils of young corngrowers, formulaically organizing the socialist competition" and failing in educational work. The extremely low yields of corn in the republic also meant that half of the fifty specialists with training in corngrowing no longer worked in that sphere of production.[87]

These developments illustrate Komsomol officials' attempts to improve efficiency in economic administration, but they achieved only limited success and did not survive Khrushchev's ouster. In early January 1961, the Komsomol Central Committee had characterized the efforts of model Komsomol organizations, which "rendered active aid to party and economic organizations in restructuring agricultural management on the basis of developing democratic forms of administration."[88] The soviets contributed substantively to the corn-growing competitions and encouraged activism, but concurrently revealed the limits to those initiatives. They held competitions and judged the results, previously the sphere of the Komsomol regional committees. Their slightly broader base of members who possessed greater contact with practical work in the fields, however, did not ensure success. The soviets continued under the control of the Komsomol secretaries who were, as before, personally responsible for the outcome. The members drawn from among production workers had minimal influence on the direction of their work, undermining the mission of "public" activism. The soviets came into being because the Central Committee directed subordinates to form them and, their quasi-independent status notwithstanding, they operated within the Komsomol's guidelines and under the command of its officials.

Studying related phenomena, scholars noted a rise in discussions of "socialist legality," to

[87] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 619, l. 3.

[88] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 598, l. 1.

be carried out by "social organizations" in the "state of all the people."[89] Parallels such as "comrades courts" and "people's patrols," appeared, expanding citizens' role in regulating their own communities. Examining the relationship of collective and individual in Russian history, Oleg Kharkhordin suggests that in the Khrushchev era naked coercion fell into disuse in comparison with the Stalin era, while social pressure and control grew, making the Khrushchev era in some ways more "repressive."[90] Yet other scholars have shown that these control mechanisms had many loopholes that limited their effectiveness.[91] As the case of the Soviets of Youth Corngrowers shows, ostensibly independent institutions and their practices nonetheless employed the same party, Komsomol, and government leaders, and continued to respond to the party's demands. In this, the organizations responded to social forces only when both aligned with official priorities.

Finally, the Komsomol competitions illustrate how Soviet farms applied industrial farming technologies with increasing frequency in the early 1960s, transforming corn cultivation. In response to Khrushchev's demands to replace manual labor with machines, apply synthetic and organic fertilizers, use herbicides, and so on, the number of participants and the number of hectares they cultivated changed radically. The transformation is clear in the example of Ukraine. In 1954, 4,500 Komsomol work teams cultivated 100,000 hectares—a per-team average of 22 hectares. In 1958, those numbers were 20,000 and 400,000, respectively, dropping the average to 20 hectares per team. In 1959, the numbers shifted radically: 24,335 teams cultivated a total of 2,031,000 hectares (an average of 83.5 hectares per team). In 1960, the number of teams declined back to 20,000, even as the hectarage they cultivated soared to

---

[89] For an example from the contemporary period, see: Leon Lipson, "Socialist Legality: The Road Uphill," in *Russia under Khrushchev*, ed. Brumberg, 465.

[90] Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 279.

[91] Deborah Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 5.

3.2 million, yielding an average of 160 hectares.[92] In 1962, when corn plantings officially totaled some 37 million hectares across the Soviet Union, the Komsomol organized 90,000 work teams that planted 18 million hectares, or almost one-half the total.[93] The transformation seems even more remarkable in light of an estimate of the numbers of workers within each team. In the mid 1950s, a work team comprised ten, twenty, or more manual labors, cultivating corn row-by-row with simple tools. By 1960, work teams (*zven'ia*, or "links") were gone, replaced by "*agregaty*" ("collections") of tractor drivers and their assistants who operated the machines. This was simply one driver and an assistant, or a handful of drivers and their assistants. The result: a few workers with capital—machines chemicals, and other materials—cultivated between 100 and 200 hectares of corn, replacing the labor of dozens, if not 100 or more manual laborers. As the report from Ukraine explained, "The army of youth corngrowers has been significantly strengthened by new leaders (lit. *maiaki*, lighthouses, sg. *maiak*)."[94]

* * *

Mobilizing youth to participate in the corn crusade, the Komsomol leadership sought not only to have members of the organization plant the crop, but also to shape the attitudes and conduct of that new generation. The corngrowing competitions therefore offered material rewards to the winning work teams, farms, and districts, but also moral incentives. The Komsomol depicted agriculture—both in the Virgin Lands and in the cornfields—as the young

[92] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 555, l. 4.

[93] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 587, l. 123.

[94] RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 9, d. 555, l. 7. Propaganda of the early 1960s commonly described a vanguard worker as a *maiak*. The term originated in revolutionary discourse, but perhaps became common owing to the resurging popularity of poet and designer Vladimir Mayakovsky (d. 1930), who used the word in his works to form puns about his own name. This can be seen, for example in a poem introducing a book of poems for children: "*Eta knizhechka moia – pro moria i pro maiak*" (1926), or "This little book of mine is about the sea and about the lighthouse." Mayakovsky is the familiar transliteration of the poet's name, which, according to the Library of Congress standard, is "Maiakovskii." As historian Stephen Bittner explains, Mayakovsky also had a countercultural resonance: a statue of him on Moscow's Gorky Street unveiled in 1958 serving as a meeting place for poetry enthusiasts. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 45.

generation's defining mission. Encouraging youth to challenge the status quo defended by conservative local authorities, the youth organization and its press used martial imagery to encourage them to commit to the project, portraying their efforts as contributions to a "struggle for high yields" and, by extension, for the material abundance Khrushchev promised. The Komsomol appealed to the idea that labor was a virtue, which leaders viewed as a major component of bringing up the "new people" who would aid in the construction of the communist society, and then be at home in it. These mechanisms of Soviet "governmentality" worked, much as the press did in general, to shape young citizens' actions and how they understood the world. Paralleling Khrushchev's educational reforms of the late 1950s, the corngrowing competitions allowed leaders to soothe fears that young people had little appreciation for manual labor, and avoided it at any cost. In placing emphasis on moral and material incentives, Khrushchev era policies deemphasized coercion, which had served as a critical lever motivating rural labor under Stalin. Responding to economic, social, and ideological change, the Soviet system instead placed greater weight on encouragement, rather than the threat of punishment.

The Komsomol leaders' efforts to mobilize the organization's members, Pioneers, and other youth evolved during the decade under Khrushchev. Beginning in 1954, local Komsomol committees directed the corngrowing competitions and, thereby, conformed to Khrushchev's requirement that they, much like the Communist Party, take the initiative in directing production. Responding to the ideological formulation that the USSR was becoming a "state of all the people, the Komsomol privileged "social activism" by volunteers. After 1960, the competitions passed from the Komsomol committees' direct oversight to a looser system entrusting everyday management to ostensibly independent Soviets of Young Corngrowers. These were autonomous in name only, however, because they operated under the same Komsomol officials who had run the competitions in previous years.

CHAPTER 7

THE WAGES OF CORN: WORK, WAGES, AND LIFE DOWN ON THE FARM

"Later on I found out that, year in and year out, it was a long time since Matryona Vasilyevna had earned a single ruble. She didn't get a pension. Her relatives gave her very little help. [On the collective farm] she had worked not for money but for credits, the marks recording her labor-days in her well-thumbed work-book." Thus Alexander Solzhenitsyn described the fortune of the sixty-year-old collective farmer with whom Ignatich, the narrator of the short story "Matryona's Home," boarded in a village deep in rural Russia in 1956.[1] Perhaps symbolizing Mother Russia, Matryona was too ill to work regularly and therefore was expelled from the collective farm. In the absence of any guaranteed income, she toiled harder than the rest to secure food and fuel for the winter. In the tradition of the nineteenth-century Russian realists, Solzhenitsyn's story, although a work of fiction, describes the lives of actual people. These dire circumstances speak volumes about the Soviet system's demands on the rural population.

Stalin's successors could not ignore the fact that rural communities and collective farms often could not fulfill state plans, let alone undertake a corn crusade or adopt industrial technologies. Lacking capital and labor, they struggled to carry out basic tasks. This chapter examines labor, collective farm discipline, and the experiences of rural citizens in the Khrushchev era by exploring material incentives, the wages in cash or kind earned for collective farm labor; additionally, it focuses on collective farms rather than state farms.[2] The majority of

---

[1] Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Solzhenitsyn Reader: New and Essential Writings, 1947–2005*, ed. Edward E. Ericson, Jr. and Daniel J. Mahoney (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006), 28.

[2] For more on the legal and financial differences between state farms and collective farms, see the dissertation's introduction, footnote 31. Zelenin explains that leaders preferred state farms, both for the practical reason that, especially before the MTS reform of 1958, they used machines more efficiently, but

cropland was farmed by collective farms, although that percentage declined annually during the Khrushchev era, reaching a low of 53.6 percent in 1964.[3] Moreover, state-farm workers' wages remained comparatively steady and were, in fact, the model that collective farmers' wages began to resemble by the end of the Khrushchev decade. In 1953, state-farm workers' wages were guaranteed, but not reliant on the outcome of production; collective farmers' income, by contrast, was wholly dependent on output. By examining collective farmers' living and working conditions, I shed light on their interactions with the farm officials and local authorities' attempts to control their labor. This is not a comprehensive history of rural life at the time, a subject that deserves its own book. Instead, I use archival sources and local newspapers to reveal how oblast, district, and farm authorities carried out Khrushchev's corn policies and his reform project as a whole. I examine the landscape seen by the foot soldiers of Khrushchev's corn campaign, those tasked with planting, cultivating, and harvesting corn. This period proved a turning point for the Soviet Union: under Khrushchev, the coercive system that developed under Stalin and that offered only moral incentives to collective farmers transformed into a new one using subtler forms of pressure while offering actual "material incentives," what Soviet sources term "*material'naia zainteresovannost'*." Identified in 1953, this "problem of material incentives" persisted despite initial reforms between 1954 and 1957. The wage reform that followed between 1958 and 1960 corresponded to a renewed attempt to motivate collective farmers, but it too encountered difficulty as farms and districts implemented it.

The Stalinist state had dominated rural communities through threats, taxes, and the MTS. The government initially had used violence to force peasants to join the collective farms

---

also for the ideological reason that state property, belonging to the whole society, was superior to property belonging only to members of the collective farm. The general tendency of the period was to make the collective farms more like state farms, but in some cases authorities converted collective farms into state farms by changing their legal standing. Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 150–59.

[3] In 1950, state farms cultivated 15.9 million hectares, and collective farms worked 121 million hectares. By 1960, those numbers climbed to 73.2 and 123 million, respectively. By 1964, state farms tilled 95.7 million hectares, while collective farms' cropland had declined slightly, to 110.8 million hectares. USSR Council of Ministers Central Statistical Department, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSSR*, 112.

(1929–33).[4] The collective farmers, in return, responded with strategies ranging from rebellion and foot-dragging, to participating in the campaigns.[5] During the war, few material rewards were possible, so authorities substituted patriotism—symbolized by medals—and appeals to defending Orthodoxy, as inducements for the mostly female labor force to support husbands and sons at the front.[6] Impoverishment was widespread, as machines, livestock, and other capital were destroyed in the areas that witnessed fighting, which drove many peasants from their homes and resulted in the deaths of many others. In Ukraine and other regions, the immediate postwar period was also one of famine due to drought and exacerbated by state procurement policies.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, peasants faced harsh working conditions on the collective farms, with the result that output remained low. After wartime service, many Red Army soldiers briefly returned to their home villages, but "soon became disillusioned by the abject poverty they encountered" and left to find a better life in the cities.[7] As a result, the ratio of women to men rose was typically 2:1, and in some areas of Russia rose as high as 3:1.[8] As Verbitskaia shows, authorities tried to increase the intensity of manual labor to "reconstruct" agricultural production, because the MTSs (and the state farms) had few machines, which had been lost to fighting or simply worn out without possibility of replacement.[9] In 1950, as the

---

[4] For more, see: Viola, *Best Sons of the Fatherland*.

[5] For more on active resistance, including the revolts by women known as *babye bunty*, see: Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*. Studies of the post-collectivization period have emphasized passive resistance and the "weapons of the weak" that feature in the work of historian Fitzpatrick: *Stalin's Peasants*. For participation in the later 1930s, see: Buckley, *Mobilizing Soviet Peasants*.

[6] Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 43.

[7] Edele, "Veterans and the Village," 171–76. For more on the returning veterans, see chapter 2, footnote 12.

[8] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Postwar Soviet Society: The 'Return to Normalcy', 1945–1953," in *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union*, ed. Susan J. Linz (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985), 144.

[9] The term "reconstruction" is problematic because it created the image of unity and of "putting the pieces back together again," when in fact the period was one of struggle and a reinforcement of the Stalinist system, even as it evolved into a more repressive system for governing the countryside. For more, see: Jones, *Everyday Life and the "Reconstruction" of Soviet Russia*, 1.

number of machines returned to the prewar level, output remained only at the 1940 level.

The problem was that the peasants who stayed on the collective farms often refused to work because the system offered them little incentive. They instead concentrated their efforts instead on the private plots on which they grew food to sustain themselves and to sell in urban markets.[10] From their inception, the collective farms used labor-days (*trudodni*, sg. *trudoden'*) that measured not actual person-days worked, but an arbitrary quantity and quality of work. Worse still, labor-days did not correspond to any set payment, only to a share of the goods left at the end of the agricultural year after the collective farm had met every one of its substantial monetary and in-kind obligations to state institutions, such as taxes and payments to the MTS. In 1948, Stalin's new policies raised quotas, work norms, and taxes, as the government moved to extract production from the peasants while paying them as little as possible, an apparent attempt to make the countryside foot the bill for postwar recovery.[11] The result was that the pay peasants received had little to do with the outcome of their work and was paltry: in 1950, between 72 and 92 percent of farms paid collective farmers less than 1 kilogram of grain or flour for a day's work. Between 4 and 8 percent in each region paid collective farmers nothing.[12] To make up the difference, the state resorted to coercion, enforcing an individual annual quota of work on the collective farm and threatening those who failed to meet it with expulsion and internal exile.[13] Even this had little effect: in 1952, more than 4 million collective farmers, or 15.9

---

[10] Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 32. Jean Lévesque echoes this conclusion: Lévesque, "'Part-Time Peasants': Labour Discipline, Collective Farm Life, and the Fate of Soviet Socialized Agriculture after the Second World War, 1945–1953," (PhD Diss., University of Toronto, 2003), ii–iii.

[11] Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 37–41. See also: Fitzpatrick, "Postwar Soviet Society," 146–47. For instance, the currency reform of 1947 wiped out peasants' savings by converting money holdings to the new rubles at a low rate.

[12] Lévesque, "'Part-Time Peasants'," 43.

[13] Jean Lévesque, "'Into the Grey Zone': Sham Peasants and the Limits of the Kolkhoz Order in the Postwar Russian Village, 1945–1953," in *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. Juliane Fürst. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 29 (New York: Routledge, 2006), 103–19.

percent, did not meet the minimum, and 600,000 did not work at all.[14]

Throughout the period up to 1953, producing grain—to feed the Red Army and a growing urban population, as well as to boost industrial development—was the collective farms' primary mission. Collective farmers' interests mattered little, so the prices farms received for their obligatory deliveries to the state fell short of production costs. Local leaders therefore took to "violating the principal of material incentives" by using compulsion to extract the harvest. For district officials and farm chairman, compulsion was the tool at hand, and the image of the strong leader, the "*edinonachal'nik*," ubiquitous. Under Stalin, a collective farm chairman protected by district authorities might act with impunity against peasants, as verbal abuse gave way to physical. By the Khrushchev era, that was no longer the case.[15] Authorities began to take reports of abuse of power and physical assault seriously.[16]

In examining peasants' work on the collective farms and responses to Khrushchev-era reforms, I draw on labor historian E. P. Thompson's concept of "moral economy," developed in studies of the nascent English working class. Historians such as Jean Lévesque have recently applied it to the Soviet peasantry, showing that peasants' understandings of what was right drove efforts to circumvent the labor discipline of the collective farm and achieve their own ends.[17] He further explains that their "habits" and "permanent dispositions" toward work and the authorities, first learned in response to collectivization and Stalin's harsh postwar policies, inclined them to avoid working on the state's terms. This confounded Khrushchev-era reform efforts because peasants' aversion to collective farm work and suspicion of the farm's agents was

---

[14] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 91. To further illustrate: in 1951, I. V. Starovskii reported to G. M. Malenkov that in one oblast alone, 40 percent of collective farms distributed less than 300 grams of grain for a labor-day, and peasants on twenty-six farms earned nothing at all. Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 298.

[15] Humphrey, *Marx Went Away, 123*.

[16] For two examples in the files of the Central Committee, see: RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, ll. 135–36; RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 23.

[17] Lévesque, "'Part-Time Peasants,'" 10.

deeply ingrained.[18] When pay was low or even nonexistent, collective farmers refused to work and employed practices that might loosely be termed "resistance," although in the Khrushchev period it was nonviolent.[19] Not only responding to actions by the party, the state, and the collective farm bosses, peasants acted using whatever means at their disposal, and in so doing, shaped the policies of their nominal superiors. Although collective farmers had little formal input into the policy-making process, they forced the authorities to respond by disregarding the rules, refusing to work, and seeking compensation by expanding private plots, appropriating hay, and taking collective farm property. Collective farm chairpersons had to coax them into the fields, exceeding the wage budget, lowering work norms, inflating pay for individual workers, and turning a blind eye to theft. Peasant actions thus changed the day-to-day operation of the collective farms and the course of Khrushchev's reforms.[20]

In this light, Khrushchev's reforms were clearly necessary to strengthen material and moral incentives, offering peasants both wages and an antidote to the Stalin-era message that they were second-class citizens. Scholars have argued that this was a turning point in the evolution of the Soviet countryside, when the stable but repressive Stalinist system transformed under reforms attributed to Malenkov and Khrushchev; these made collective farmers more like state-farm workers, and granted them more rights.[21]

* * *

---

[18] Ibid., 39–43.

[19] Violent resistance, such as attacks on the agents of the party and state, were common during collectivization, but became rare by the mid 1930s. M. A. Beznin and T. M. Dimoni document isolated cases up to 1953. In the postwar period, they find what they call "social protest" far more common: expanding private plots, refusing to work, observing religious holidays, and writing complaints to authorities. Beznin and Dimoni, "Krest'ianstvo i vlast' v Rossii," 156.

[20] In this way, I owe a debt to James C. Scott's concept that peasant societies, armed with "weapons of the weak," counter efforts to impose policies on them reinforces this importance. Their "individual acts," multiplied over time and through repetition, subvert modernizing projects and other policies. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), xvii.

[21] For example, see: Beznin and Dimoni, "Krest'ianstvo i vlast' v Rossii," 156.

An April 1953 summary of letters written by peasants in restive western Ukraine confirms that word of collective farmers' desperation reached L. P. Beria, G. M. Malenkov, and Khrushchev. "Dearest child, a spring so beautiful has come," one man wrote his daughter, "but what can be done if there is nothing to live on? Whatever [the farm] has is not ours. What's more, there's no way to earn anything in our village. People work the whole summer and gather the harvest, and then the bosses divide it among themselves, leaving nothing [for the laborers]." Another writer lamented, "Dearest sister, I have not received even a single potato from the collective farm in the whole time it has existed." Others complained of high taxes and of being cheated out of labor-days by farm managers.[22] Summaries of letters, or *svodki*, are useful sources: police officials culled excerpts from letters and compiled them into reports that highlighted issues that circumstances or political leaders' preferences made important. They do not directly convey the views of the letter writers: like any other source, they have been shaped by those who complied them. When the filters used are accounted for, however, these summaries can reveal what concerned officials.[23] A police official in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR gathered this one and sent it to Beria, the USSR Minister of Internal Affairs.[24] Its purpose was to highlight peasants' complaints about pay and work, well known to leaders and attested to in many other sources. Additionally, the report cited letters from a handful of regions in western Ukraine, which the Soviet state had incorporated them only in 1944. Having fought there against nationalist partisans and collectivized farms only in the late 1940s, the Soviet leadership was especially attuned to instability in these locales.[25]

---

[22] RGANI, f. 5, op. 24, d. 536, l. 2.

[23] For further explanation of the pitfalls and uses of *svodki*, see: Jones, *Everyday Life and the "Reconstruction" of Russia*, 13.

[24] Between March and June 1953, Beria headed this ministry, which encompassed both the regular police and the political police, which previously had been a separate ministry, the MGB [*Ministerstvo gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*], and became after Beria's downfall the KGB [*Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*].

[25] For more on the situation in western Ukraine at the time, see: Weiner, "Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution."

In August 1953, when Khrushchev and Malenkov began to address agricultural policy, they recognized these problems and moved to solve them. The peasants had little incentive to work, and therefore put little effort into what they did in the collective farms' fields. As a result, the state did not get the grain, meat, milk, wool, and other goods it needed. A letter to the Central Committee from a party member and employee of the Vologda oblast newspaper *Krasnyi sever* [Red North], F. N. Kirikov, described the effect of repressive policies on labor, and influenced Khrushchev. Writing in July, Kirikov denounced the policy that resulted from Khrushchev's initiative in the late 1940s to grant collective farms the power to expel collective farmers who failed to earn the labor-day minimum. Eliminating a peasant's right to a personal plot, the punishment had to be confirmed by vote of collective farmers, but was so harsh that many collective farmers refused to enforce it.[26] For others, it was no punishment at all, because they did not want to work on the farm. "Such measures had no effect here," Kirikov asserted. "Those who were expelled happily left the collective farm: that was their goal. How could one consider it punishment for a collective farmer to leave a farm where he earned nothing for his work?"[27] Instead, expelled collective farmers found employment in nearby industries such as timber production, and managed to keep their personal plots anyway. Those remaining refused to work on the farm. "Low labor discipline is readily apparent in the poor quality of the work," Kirikov wrote. Peasants preferred to celebrate religious holidays and go mushroom picking to venturing into the fields, even when groups of townspeople arrived to help. The collective farmer had nothing to fear, "because administrative measures have lost their effect. She fears neither them nor expulsion from the collective farm." The peasants, moreover, openly acknowledged that they worked only so much as to avoid losing the private plot.[28] Kirikov concluded that, having little incentive to care for output, farmworkers were foremost among the reasons for the

[26] For more, see: Lévesque, "'Into the Grey Zone'," 103–19.

[27] RGANI, f.5, op. 24, d. 589, l. 82.

[28] RGANI, f. 5, op. 24, d. 589, l. 93.

oblast's failures. This motivated Khrushchev to bring up the oblast's failures before a gathering of party leaders in early August.[29]

Having learned of the problem through letters and *svodki*, Khrushchev and Malenkov moved to address labor and wages as early as August and September 1953. A. A. Nikonov explains that the initial reforms Khrushchev introduced at the September plenum consisted of policies to address what the leader termed "low labor discipline " and "violations of the principle of material incentives," meaning wage rates and payment.[30] For their part, the collective farmers confronted the problem daily. For instance, a tractor driver or other skilled specialist earned multiple labor-days for a single person-day at work in the fields; the manual labor that field hands—mostly women—performed warranted only one. The collective farm charter still required peasants to accumulate a relatively high quota of labor-days, but the compensation for each "tally," a mark in an individual's labor book signifying a labor-day completed, was unknown, contingent on the year's harvest, and often paltry. In 1954, following rises in procurement prices farms received from the state permitted them to raise wages, many collective farmers still received little for their work.[31] That year, the average annual income from 200 days' work on the collective farms amounted to as little as 33 percent of that of an equivalent state-farm worker.[32]

After 1953, harsh punishments remained on the books, but their ineffectiveness further robbed authorities of power to muster farmworkers. Efforts under Stalin to coerce peasants

---

[29] RGANI, f. 5, op. 23, d. 589, l. 91. For Khrushchev's comments on the letter, see: Tomilina, et al., eds. *Dva tsveta vremeni*, 2:25. As a result, Khrushchev heavily criticized the oblast party leader, A. V. Semin, who was sacked in 1954. RGANI f. 5, op. 32, d. 25, ll. 95–97, cited in: Khlevniuk, *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*, 79–81.

[30] Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 299.

[31] In April 1955, a report to the Central Committee from a district in Kazakhstan explained that one collective farmer in four completed no work on the farm, an approach the district party boss termed "completely refusing to engage in socially-useful work and adhering to a parasitic way of life." RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 61.

[32] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, ll. 72–73.

through "administrative measures" achieved little because, as Kirikov's letter suggests, the peasants did not fear the punishment. The entire collective had to vote to expel a collective farmer who did not meet the labor-day quota. In many cases, groups of collective farmers refused to confirm the punishment, evidence that they considered the polices unjust and the penalty too harsh. Intricate power relations between the peasants and the collective farm managers made certain that the officials could not simply overturn the peasants' decision. Although possessing considerable power, farm managers could not use it arbitrarily to punish a few offenders, because that action would ensure that peasants would not cooperate in the future. As the Malenkov—Khrushchev reforms came into force in 1953, reducing the punishment from expulsion to a higher tax rate, this dynamic remained. Two district party workers in Lithuania, N. S. Il'in and A. I. Vol'f, wrote to the Central Committee to complain. Established only in the late 1940s as the restive republic became Sovietized, the collective farms had little control over peasants. Blaming the "personal property-based psychology" of the peasants, the local party authorities described how collective farmers expanded their plots beyond the legal maximum, cut hay from collective fields, and carted away grain from collective stocks. "Many collective farm families, and especially women, do not take part in socialized production at any time of the year; they are completely preoccupied with their individual farm, considering it more profitable than the collective."[33] The officials noted that farm managers could not easily impose the prescribed 50 percent increase in the taxes assessed on private-plot production. Every family had at least one member who failed to meet the labor-day minimum and, therefore, the general assembly of collective farmers refused to ratify the taxes. "For that reason," Il'in and Vol'f declared, "the loafers go unpunished."[34]

Although circumstances in Lithuania were atypical, it was not alone in witnessing this

---

[33] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 14. For more on the context of Lithuania, see: Mincyte, "Everyday Environmentalism."

[34] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 16.

kind of refusal. In Stavropol krai, between 20 and 30 percent of members of the Malenkov and Apanasenko collective farms in the Apanasenko district failed to meet the labor-day minimum in 1954. Requiring labor to complete the harvest, the collective farm chairpersons resorted to hiring workers from outside the collective and even the krai—as far away as Astrakhan oblast and Belarus—to earn in a few weeks of intense labor what a collective farmer might make in a whole year. In these two collectives alone, the bill for these workers amounted to over 1 million rubles in 1953 and 500,000 more in 1954.[35] Despite having to go this length because the collective farmers refused to work, the farm managers declined to report the names of collective farmers to receive the tax penalty. Admonition by officials from the krai financial office achieved little, so they demanded the krai party committee take action. "The majority . . . do not report the required lists [of offenders] and some . . . treat this extremely important measure formalistically again this year," the accountants indignantly declared. On the "Zavety Il'icha" collective farm of Apollon district, they accused, "the managers' negligent preparation for the meeting permitted the general assembly of collective farmers to reject the prepared list . . . on the grounds that every collective farmer had not fulfilled the labor-day minimum for legitimate reasons." The document sardonically terms this a circumstance "that is extremely unlikely."[36]

In 1953 and 1954, reforms increased procurement prices, cut taxes, and scaled back compulsory deliveries, all of which improved collective farmers' conditions and boosted output. Nonetheless, pay remained low and incentives sparse, so the amount and quality of labor

---

[35] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6537, ll. 1–2. At the exchange rate of four rubles to the dollar, the 1953 figure amounts to $2.2 million dollars in 2013, providing an illustration of the size and complexity of the collective farms in the krai. That year, the 316 collective farms in the krai averaged more than 9,800 hectares of cropland. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6537, ll. 52–53. Officials from the State Bank discovered that chairpersons had diverted collective farm funds earmarked for paying members' wages had been used for other purposes, to the tune more than 50,000 rubles on at least five farms in the Arzgir district alone. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6537, l. 8.

[36] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6537, l. 7. A similar, if extreme, case occurred in Ukraine's Ternopil oblast, where in one collective farm, 334 of 1037 members (32.2 percent) did not earn a single labor-day in 1954. TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4182, l. 86. Farm managers' efforts to combat this problem included economic sanctions. In one farm in Belarus in 1957, they attempted to implement a policy docking those who failed to meet the minimum number of labor-days 10 percent of the total, with the result that 416 labor-days were stripped from thirty-two collective farmers. RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, l. 66.

collective farmers expended in the farm's fields was inadequate. Leaders came to understand that those initial reforms had achieved only limited success. In May 1955, Deputy Minister of Agriculture V. V. Matskevich informed Khrushchev and the Central Committee that again in 1954 collective farms paid a pittance to their collective farmers. In all, 1.9 percent of collective farms distributed no flour or grain as payment in kind, while a further 8.5 percent paid less than 300 grams, and a further 13.2 percent between 300 and 500 grams.[37] Matskevich also reported that this was an improvement, and that overall income had risen 27 percent. And the proof was in the movement of population: for the first time since 1947 and 1948, the flow of peasants fleeing their villages for urban areas and industrial occupations—despite passport controls designed to thwart them—had reversed.[38]

Realizing that higher pay incentivized greater productivity, leaders implemented a scheme for paying bonuses for output that exceeded the plan's target yield, aimed initially at specific crops and animal husbandry products. This principle went into effect widely in 1956, but it began in 1955 as a pilot project that paid bonuses for high yields of corn. Documents accompanying the proposal clearly identified its mission to raise production by using material incentives. Even in areas where collectives had previously grown corn, the farms had ignored an existing policy requiring bonuses for exemplary harvests. In Vinnytsia oblast of southwestern Ukraine, only 40 of the nearly 1,000 collectives followed the old directive.[39] In the old system,

---

[37] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 89.

[38] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 92. In 1955, the collective farms served by the Reutov MTS of Moscow oblast saw collective farmers earn only 435,600 of the 503,300 labor-days earned. Of the difference, 17,000 went to people "brought in from outside," and a further 66,500 by MTS workers (who also received pay as state employees). The remainder of the days were worked by youth under sixteen and the aged. Of the able-bodied farm members, 209 of the total of 1331 (15.7 percent) worked fewer than the minimum of 200 labor-days, and 66 of those (4.9 percent) did not work at all. The average able-bodied member worked 326 days. TsGAMO, f. 191, op. 1, d. 2161, l. 2. For a labor-day, collective members earned 300 grams of bread or flour. TsGAMO, f. 191, op. 1, d. 2161, ll. 8–9. Notably, the district's yields for corn were correspondingly low, amounting to only 5.6 tons per hectare of green fodder. TsGAMO, f. 191, op. 1, d. 2161, l. 3. The file contains records for eight other MTS that returned similar results.

[39] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 108, l. 90.

barely 10 percent of peasants earned bonuses.[40] Officials in Moscow connected higher pay with production, noting that "with the significant expansion of corn plantings, it is of special importance to establish monetary incentives, which would better interest all collective farmers in increasing the area planted in corn and the achievement of the harvest."[41] This resolution "recommended" that collective farms establish a pool consisting of 15 percent of any above-plan production from which to distribute bonuses, half going proportionally to those who had earned labor-days for a given cornfield's cultivation and harvest, and half going to all collective farmers based on total labor-days earned. Adopting this directive in August 1955, Soviet leaders spread this policy to every oblast and republic where collective farms grew corn. The policy of paying bonuses for growing corn, moreover, continued throughout the decade, and also applied to state-farm workers.[42]

These policies offered collective farmers reward for larger harvests, but results often failed to live up to officials' expectations. In practical terms, the directive had the same force as law, but the legal fiction of the collective farms' independence meant that it took the form of a recommendation that each farm's general meeting then adopted.[43] This left the door open to "shortcomings." For example, in the autumn of 1955, the leader of a work team in Stavropol krai's Aleksandrov district, a Comrade Mezhniakova, wrote to the krai newspaper to draw attention to her farm's failures to harvest the corn. The year's crop had turned out poorly and, worse still, the harvest lagged behind schedule. Each collective farmer had personal livestock, so they needed corn for feed, as well as wood for fuel, both of which were scarce on the steppe. The farm managers had arranged for neither as part of in-kind payment for the labor-days farmers

---

[40] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 79.

[41] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 108, l. 90.

[42] See, for instance, a report on these efforts in Ukraine's Khmel'nyts'kiy oblast in 1961. RGANI, f. 5, op. 31, d. 168, ll. 79–84.

[43] As Nikonov notes, measures taken in March 1956 attempted to counteract district authorities' meddling, although with apparently little result. Nikonov, *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy*, 305.

had earned. Mezhniakova blamed the authorities for wasting time on meetings and paperwork instead of organizing the harvest. She reported that this failure had "destroyed the collective farmers' belief" in earning wages for work. The managers did not care, she continued, how the collective farmers lived or worked but, "if they implemented the measures for increasing material incentives, it is doubtful that the members of my work team, Comrades Demenko, Brykalova, and Zhukova, would stay home to gather fuel" instead of harvesting corn. [44] The collective farmers lacked confidence that the farm's management would remunerate them and, therefore, they refused to work. Whether a collective farmer actually wrote the article, or a state or party official did so, it singled out those who failed to follow the initiative to reward collective farmers. The frequent invocation of "material incentives" in this period illustrates this term's place in the official lexicon as a principle all officials had to heed.

Similar problems arose because of accounting practices. Collective farm work teams in Stavropol krai accrued bonuses only for crops for which they exceeded the production plan, ignoring those for which they achieved below-plan yields.[45] An earlier policy had "recommended" a penalty of 1 percent of labor-days earned for each percentage difference between the planned yield and the lesser actual figure. Yet local officials refused to implement this policy, hoping to avoid conflict with the collective farmers, whose sense of fairness rejected docking labor-days. Thus the spirit of the directive, providing bonuses for better yields and penalties for lower, got lost in the policy's implementation.

Alongside the new wage policies of 1955, reforms required collectives to set a new, higher labor-day minimum and a monthly quota. This prevented collective farmers from avoiding work in planting and harvesting months, when the collective farm needed them more than ever, but they focused on their private plots. Because it required approval by a meeting of all collective

---

[44] P. Mezhniakova, "Kogda budet vydavat' kukuruzu na trudodni?" *Stavropol'skaia pravda* (October 14, 1955), 3.

[45] L. Pankratov, "Nekotorye voprosy oplaty truda v kolkhozakh," *Stavropol'skaia pravda* (April 2, 1955): 3.

farmers, the farms implemented this directive haphazardly. For instance, 20 percent of farms in the RSFSR established gender-differentiated norms.[46] A lower quota for women acknowledged the reality peasants and collective farm officials knew well: women primarily milked and did manual labor in the fields, tasks earning few labor-days. Moreover, they worked less on the farm because they shouldered the bulk of domestic labor and maintained the family's private plot. Authorities nonetheless considered it unacceptable, perhaps because it reduced the labor power available, and perhaps because it contradicted ideals of gender equality.[47]

As a result of these reforms, Matskevich later reported, enthusiasm had grown, and exemplary collective farms' high productivity correlated to the higher and more reliable pay their collective farmers earned. Successful farms dedicated a set proportion of income, between 40 and 60 percent, to paying wages. They distributed pay in monthly advances rather than as a single lump sum at the end of the year, and assigned higher priority to paying wages and doing so regularly during the year, rather than out of the leftovers at the end. These reforms "allow the collectives to expand the part of their incomes that are distributed according to labor-days."[48] In support of Matskevich, Gosplan, the State Planning Agency, reported that "the most important stimulus . . . for raising collective farmers' material incentives to raise output of agricultural products is implementing . . . monthly advance payments on labor-days from the income of the collective farm."[49] The new policies ensured that workers received something for their work each month, and wages rose as a result. In 1956, the total farm incomes for the RSFSR amounted to 35.28 billion rubles for collective farms, while in 1957, that figure grew to 37.3 billion. The total wage bill amounted to 14.72 billion rubles, or 39.5 percent. As a result, the average wage for the

---

[46] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 111.

[47] This disparity emerges in a survey of some 500 peasant families in Stavropol krai, where the average man earned 2.2 labor-days for a single person-day, while women earned 1.8, or nearly one-fifth less. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6537, l. 10.

[48] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, ll. 73–74.

[49] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 111, l. 78.

Russian republic amounted to 3,022 rubles per collective farmer, although this concealed a wide range: the lowest average for an oblast was 1,142, and the highest was a comfortable 7,896.[50] Guaranteeing collective farmers some payment in exchange for labor might not seem a revolutionary concept, but it represented a significant innovation in Soviet practice. By 1959, Soviet leaders moved to convert the conditional payments given at the end of the agricultural year into a guaranteed minimum wage. These policies reflected conclusions drawn after attempts made in 1954 and 1955 to reform wages.

* * *

Wage incentives to work in collective fields shaped Khrushchev's corn crusade, especially because before 1960 manually cultivating and harvesting the crop consumed vast amounts of the collective farms' limited labor force at critical planting and harvesting times. Even when managers had workers to direct, they often assigned the farmers to other crops considered more valuable. This created a vicious cycle in which those in charge considered corn a low-yielding and therefore low-priority crop. Assigning little labor to cultivating it, they confirmed their preconceptions by ensuring that corn produced small harvests. In 1958, inspectors in eastern Siberia's Krasnoiarsk krai found a common scene: collective farms had planted the corn that the plan required, but in fields with the poorest soil, without applying fertilizer. They compounded this by expending little effort to care for it, cultivating the crop "with considerable delay and low standards, with the result that the corn was fully overgrown with weeds." All of this determined that it produced low yields. In Shirin district, farms brought in a maximum of 5.5 tons of feed per hectare. Declaring that the farm mangers "underappreciated corn as the principal feed crop," the inspector rejected the farm managers' pleas that they lacked the necessary machinery and labor force to complete planting, cultivating, and harvesting in a timely fashion.[51] Inspectors

[50] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, ll. 108–12.

[51] GARF, f. A-340, op.1, d. 116, ll. 8–9. Only 37 percent of fields, for example, received fertilizer.

found that despite numerous declarations announcing material incentives' importance, farms used them little and they were therefore ineffective. They also discovered this problem in Briansk oblast. "None of the inspected farms have developed any material incentives for rewarding corngrowers. Even where they have enacted bonuses amounting to 50 percent of the harvest exceeding the plan, they are not actually paid anywhere."[52] This occurred even in Krasnodar krai, which Roswell Garst and Soviet experts alike recommended to Khrushchev as best suited to industrial corn cultivation on the model of the American Corn Belt. In 1958, an inspection concluded that yields were high only where farms implemented the proper techniques. "Nonetheless," it explains, "the example of vanguard workers is insufficiently adopted and corn yields remain low," amounting to only 1.29 metric tons of grain, just less than one-half the planned 2.52 tons. Similarly, the 63.6 tons of silage grown fell far short of the planned 132.4 tons. "Many farms undervalue its importance," and therefore "corn is often planted on poor, unfertilized plots, and the cultivation it requires is not carried out."[53] Four years of endless agitation and propaganda between 1955 and 1958 had achieved far less than Khrushchev had hoped, and this problem did not go away. As late as September 1963 the problem remained: in a speech that month, Khrushchev told of Garst's visit to a nearby farm in the krai. There, the American witnessed workers planting corn without applying the fertilizer necessary to achieve the full benefit of the high-yielding double-cross hybrids. Unable to stop them, Garst angrily pledged to tell Khrushchev of the outrage.[54]

Furthermore, 57 percent of fields had been first plowed the previous fall, to preserve as much of the winter snows as moisture in the soil. That means that the remaining 43 percent did not conform to that useful recommendation.

[52] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 116, l. 38.

[53] GARF, f. A-340, op. 1, d. 107, l. 17.

[54] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 8:179. To illustrate, in 1954, Stavropol krai fulfilled only 18 percent its plan for applying fertilizer, a crude measure of the process. Of the 2 million metric tons of organic fertilizer, only 372,300 tons made it into the field. In some districts, this figure was as low as 5 percent. Additionally, there were only 6,000 tons of chemical fertilizer for the whole krai. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6539, l. 5. As late as 1961, these problems persisted, as evidenced by Khrushchev's initiative during that period to ramp up production. That year, the farms in Aleksandrovsk district applied only

Harvesting corn was a labor-intensive process, especially the method called "two-part harvesting." Where corn matured fully, laborers manually harvested the cobs before machines chopped the plant for fodder. This produced two types of feed: the cobs provided a nutrient- and calorie-dense feed for hogs. Unsuitable for them, the plant could instead be consumed by cattle as a substitute for hay. The resulting demand for labor was intense. In September 1955, the Central Committee received reports from Voronezh, Kursk, Lipetsk, and Belgorod oblasts expecting a good harvest of sugar beets, but voicing concerns that it could not be brought in on time because of the labor demands of expanded corn plantings.[55] As mentioned earlier, authorities diverted students and workers from normal activities for short-term work on farms for this purpose.[56] In another case in 1955, the Ukrainian Central Committee in Kyiv reported satisfaction with the contributions of Soviet Army soldiers to alleviate the labor shortage, requesting that they be allowed to extend their stay from twenty to thirty-five days to help with the harvest of corn, sugar beets, and potatoes.[57]

To make up for shortfalls, officials might attempt to coerce peasants into the fields to complete the harvest; peasants, for their part, could respond by appealing to superiors. An anonymous complaint to the USSR Ministry of Government Oversight from Ukraine's Chernihiv oblast purportedly represented the words of "some workers." In November 1956, they called attention to large areas of crops lost due to mismanagement, and denounced the authoritarian methods district party officials used in efforts to bring in the harvest. As winter advanced, 1,134

238.5 tons of the 1,546 tons of synthetic fertilizers on hand. GANISK, f 1, op. 2, d. 8594, l. 101. Similarly, chemical pesticides and herbicides lay unused. In 1961, again, the territory had enough 2-4D, a common herbicide, to treat 50,000 hectares of corn, but they lacked the crop-dusting airplanes to apply it. As of June 10, when its use was critical, only 700 hectares, or 1.4 percent of the total, had been treated. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8597, ll. 6–7.

[55] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 84, ll. 94–95.

[56] Other examples abound: The Central Committee agricultural department head's response to a telegram from Kyrgyzstan in September 1955 reminds the republic's authorities that they already possess the power to carry out such plans. RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 84, l. 103.

[57] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 84, l. 104.

hectares of potatoes and sugar beets remained unharvested in the fields, causing the party bosses to "try to hide this through falsifications of data and compelling people to work in inhumane conditions." The officials attempted to force all local residents into the fields under the threat of a fine of 100 rubles for noncompliance. Moreover, the letter complains that the oblast party committee knew about these illegal measures, yet did nothing. "It is time to hold these people responsible. . . . *Verify this by sending an inspector from your apparat* [emphasis in original]."[58] When required by officials in Moscow to investigate, oblast authorities found the charges mostly true. In addition to poor weather, progress lagged because of "the large volume of labor-intensive tasks, including digging sugar beets and potatoes, and harvesting corn." To placate the peasants, the oblast committee sacked one collective farm's chairman and the director of the local MTS, while the district party officials received only warnings. Investigators discovered the threat of a 100-ruble fine, which the letter writers found the most outrageous of all, to be real. They rescinded it, ensuring that no one had paid it.[59] Peasants' ability to lodge complaints was a serious threat to delinquent local officials, but their letters also reveal local conditions otherwise hidden.

Collective farmers came into conflict with farm managers or local authorities over a variety of concerns. In cases of conflicts between farm managers and collective farmers, each had recourse to higher authorities. A chairperson who violated collective farmers' sense of fairness might escape consequences, especially if enjoying district authorities' protection. In that case, peasants could pursue justice by writing letters to newspapers, inspectorates, or party officials up to and including Khrushchev. Those letters did not always reach top authorities, or achieve results; moreover, the letters that survive were not collected and preserved in systematic fashion, but instead as *svodki* and other collections of documents based on officials' opaque selection criteria. Those letters of complaint that do exist in the files, however, suggest that this

[58] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 5, d. 92, l. 210.

[59] GARF, f. R-8300, op. 5, d. 92, ll. 213–14.

approach offered the authors an opportunity for justice, using the system to achieve their own ends.[60] In a January 1957 summary of letters compiled by officials in the procuracy and sent to the Central Committee, peasants accused collective farm managers of all manner of unfairness. In one case, a chairman allowed the farm to fail and did not arrange basic communal necessities, such as a bathhouse, or *banya*, while he abused his access to an official car. "Velichko has set himself up like a dictator (*ednionachal'nik*): whatever he says goes. He pays those who don't work and those who work – he doesn't pay. And if Lenin were to come back, what would he say to us?" the letter queried. Velichko enjoyed the protection of the district officials who ignored the criticisms made by collective farmers and exacted legal retribution against those who spoke out.[61] Another letter, written by an outsider based on conversations with members of a collective in Ukraine's Khar'kiv oblast, declared bluntly: "They say that wherever they rule from Moscow, there is order; and wherever there is local power – it's better to stay quiet."[62] Individuals took action they saw as justified as a result of such abuses, thieving to make up for unpaid work: "Velichko has corrupted the people, who have begun to refuse to work, and to steal collective farm property."[63]

Although unlikely to be the only cause for removing a farm or district official, charges of "having suppressed criticism" *(zazhim kritiki)* and "violating the democratic basis of managing the collective" often headlined the charges against them during Khrushchev's campaigns to improve farm management and make production more efficient.[64] Nonetheless, the letters

---

[60] Beznin and Dimoni document that letter writing as a form of protest was a common one: between 1947 and 1950, 92,795 complaints to authorities in the Soviet for Collective Farm Affairs (*Sovet po delam kolkhozov*, created in 1946 and disbanded in 1953), including 27,307 about "violations of the collective farm charter." Beznin and Dimoni, "Krest'ianstvo i vlast' v Rossii," 163. For more on the Soviet for Collective Farm Affairs, see: Levesque, "'Part-Time Peasants.'"

[61] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, ll. 2–3

[62] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, l. 6.

[63] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, l. 3. The rest of the *svodka* contains many similar stories drawn from other collectives in Ukraine.

[64] This phrase, in just one example, applied to a whole group of offenders documented in the summary

themselves occasionally proved suspect: on inspection, some anonymous letters turned out to contain baseless accusations. One claimed that an official had committed arson by burning down a farm building: the building's destruction was documentable, but the charges of arson were impossible to verify.[65] There are several potential causes for such accusations. First, letter writers perhaps considered factual things only rumored in a tight-knit rural community. Second, they reported circumstances that could not be proven by subsequent inspection, including episodes of drunkenness, fraud, theft, and so on.

Peasants practiced other forms of resistance, including theft. This seems to have been common, but not substantial enough to influence output. Instead, its prevalence and persistence signal peasants' deeper dissatisfaction with conditions and pay on the farms. S. N. Kruglov, Khrushchev's choice to replace L. P. Beria as head of the powerful Ministry of Internal Affairs and responsible for the regular police, reported on the 1955 harvest, quantifying "numerous cases of grain theft" uncovered as of October 5. In all, 3,292 legal actions against 4,229 individuals involved the loss of only 756 tons of grain stolen, of which the authorities recovered 701.[66] Although a substantial amount of grain, as a fraction of the 103.7 million tons harvested across the USSR that year, it represents an insignificant .0007 percent.[67] Regardless of efforts to detect, report, and investigate the crime, officials could do little to quantify the total number; however, even if the actual number of thefts were several times that Kruglov reported, it would remain comparatively inconsequential.

Thefts too small to report seem to have occurred frequently, leaving officials at a loss to combat them. The authorities of Rivne oblast wrote to Ukrainian republic leaders bemoaning an inspection's finding that "the weak organization of security and preventative measures" resulted

---

report that included the case of Velichko, but many others. RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, l. 2.

[65] See, for example: RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, l. 81.

[66] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 84, l. 136.

[67] USSR Council of Ministers Central Statistical Department, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSSR*, 152

in missing beets, potatoes, and corn. They suggested that most theft occurred at the end of the workday: when collective farmers returned home, they simply took a little of the crop along with them. Authorities' attempts to limit these thefts by dispatching police and procuracy officials to the countryside had some effect, catching forty-three people, including eighteen for stealing corn.[68] However, these were only a small part of the problem.

These reports represent the view of the procuracy, taking pains to emphasize its officials' usefulness; however, farm officials sought the authority to punish thefts too small to turn over to the legal system. [69] In Ukraine's Ternopil oblast, they struggled to find suitable punishments and resorted to what the procuracy condemned as "administrative measures." As one chairman explained, "I understand that this is unlawful, but when it is ineffectual to bring a criminal case, the collective farm management must adopt these measures." "Petty" thefts of three or five kilograms of grain or chopping wood from collective land received fines of up to five labor-days or twenty-five rubles.[70] Fining peasants a quantity of labor-days had little effect, however, because they received unreliable and low pay for them E. K. Zhidkikh, the chairman of a collective in Ukraine's Nikolaev oblast, described efforts over several years to tighten the farm's labor discipline, which was "on a very low level" when he, one of Khrushchev's thirty-thousanders, arrived. This levy of party members in industrial and military posts was dispatched to fill leadership positions in rural districts in hopes of strengthening party discipline and output. It drew on the legacy of the twenty-five thousanders, urban party militants sent to the countryside to facilitate enforcing collectivization.[71] "As a result of [poor labor discipline] the harvest of corn, as well as the processing of hemp and rice, was completed only in the early moths of the following year," Zhidkikh reported. "More importantly," his letter went on, "there

[68] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4182, ll. 46–48.

[69] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4182, l. 74.

[70] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4182, ll. 70–72.

[71] For more, see: Viola, *Best Sons of the Fatherland*.

were many instances of pilfering of collective farm property." Despite improvements in discipline, theft continued. The threat of court action failed to deter them, so the farm managers had set up a system of fines for those responsible for guarding the property that had been stolen. Zhidkikh imposed them on three collective farmers who should have been guarding the hogs when three were stolen. Those fined complained to the district committee, which overturned the ruling and required the committee to take it to the courts. Exasperated, the chairman wrote to the Central Committee in Moscow asking for help and clarification of the law.[72] In the end, authorities denied the chairman's request for power for himself or the collective's general meeting to mete out such punishments.[73]

Petty theft reflected collective farmers' feelings that the system was unjust: they considered their pay too low, so they sought to fodder, fuel, or other necessities by any available means. Procuracy officials in Ukraine inferred that these thefts occurred because farms failed to pay peasants in the feed they needed for their personal livestock.[74] On one collective farm, the harvest was determined to be 1.8 metric tons of rye, 1.2 tons of wheat, and 2.4 tons of corn, all relatively good yields. As a result of poor management and late harvesting, however, the collective farm brought in the last thirty-seven hectares of corn only in February, by which time more than half of the wheat and corn crops had been stolen or lost.[75] As a detailed analysis of theft on the Malenkov collective in Chortkiv district of Ternopil oblast surmised, theft "is widespread and largely goes unpunished, [being] especially common during the planting and harvesting campaigns, when potatoes, corn, beets, grain, hay, and other crops are stolen."[76]

---

[72] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, ll. 59–60. Similar efforts were apparently widespread. For example, in one oblast of Belarus, the USSR Procuracy found that between 1955 and 1957, more than 3,000 unlawful punishments by collective management or district officials were overturned. RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, l. 65.

[73] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, l. 62.

[74] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4182, l. 80.

[75] TsDAHOU, f .1, op. 24, d. 4182, ll. 97–98.

[76] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4182, ll. 86–87. "Petty" thefts encompassed weights from as little as four

Alienated from the collective farm, peasants did not see theft from the farm's fields as stealing from themselves, which it was in a legal sense. Because they earned a pittance from collective farm work and identified so little with its mission, there was little incentive to "preserve collective farm property," as Soviet sources termed it. Partially blind to peasant motivations, officials' characterizations revealed more about their own judgments than the views of the collective farmers they hoped to understand and control. For example, another collective farm in Ternopil oblast's Chortkiv district had a smaller number of members, ensuring a tight-knit community in which little that happened might remain secret. The farm had a smaller land area, simplifying managers' job of overseeing farmworkers in outlying fields. Mutual surveillance among farmworkers and quicker action by officials to punish thieves resulted in less pilfering. Theft, common on many farms, was comparatively rare on this farm, suggesting that peasants took advantage of opportunities presented by the collective farm's structure by exploiting holes in managers' oversight of their activities. Unable to conclude that the collective farmers considered the farm exploitative or illegitimate, however, officials instead supposed that the widespread practice was merely a holdover from the previous lower stage of social development, in which landowners had openly exploited the peasants. The writer of this report conjectured that the peasants' habit of taking home an armload of feed or a bit of grain at the end of the workday had developed under the Polish landlords who had ruled as recently as the 1930s, when the oblast had been part of interwar Poland. In that system, peasants who returned from the landowner's fields took a bit of the crop for themselves as payment, making this a practice of long standing.[77]

Local authorities stole too. In one case, a collective farm bought three loads of hay from a neighboring farm. With the collusion of the collective's chairman, one ended up in the

---

kilograms of grain to as many as thirty kilograms of corn. Even individuals caught twice in the same year received no punishment for either incident.

[77] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4182, l. 93. Another example can be found in TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4182, l. 99.

possession of the farm's accountant, a transgression that several collective farmers reported to inspectors.[78] If such officials accused others of theft, they faced charges of hypocrisy, resulting in a blow to whatever authority they possessed.

Theft and related problems of labor discipline remained prevalent throughout the Khrushchev period. In December 1959, N. V. Podgornyi, first secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee, reported to Khrushchev that an inspection uncovered numerous "malignant parasites" in rural communities that required rapid and decisive "measures of social action," including the well-known "comrades' courts."[79] Inspecting a sample of 373 villages across Ukraine, officials found many rural residents who avoided "socially beneficial labor." In place of employment they preferred "moonshining, speculation, and seeking out other paths to an easy living. They lead antisocial, parasitic ways of life, which arouses the just resentment of honest collective farmers." Among these troublemakers, Podgornyi counted freelance laborers and those who, although collective farmers, shunned work on the farm in favor of their private plots.[80] Khrushchev, for his part, ordered that the report be circulated to the entire Central Committee and members of republic, oblast, and territory committees, indicating that he viewed this as a problem requiring wider attention.[81] Theft remained a problem as late as September 1964, when an inspection covering ten oblasts in the RSFSR reported 755 cases against 1,018 people, resulting in the recovery of 379 metric tons of grain. Farmers and procurement workers themselves perpetrated most thefts, and some of them, far from "petty," ran to hundreds of kilograms of grain.[82]

---

[78] TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 24, d. 4182, l. 89.

[79] For more on these, see: Aksiutin and Pyzhikov, *Post-Stalinskoe obshchestvo*, 199; and Kharkhordin, *Collective and the Individual in Russia*.

[80] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 409, ll. 40–42.

[81] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 409, l. 30.

[82] Up to the beginning of October, 2,225 total prosecutions against 3,138 people recovered 1,190 tons of grain. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 22, d. 490, ll. 100–4.

Social problems were not limited to theft: alcohol abuse and its consequences also contributed to erratic work and lost productivity. In 1958, the Central Committee circulated, "On strengthening the struggle against drunkenness and moonshine." Each oblast's party organization then carried out a series of meetings to raise awareness of the problem, gatherings that also allowed a forum for denouncing offenders. As a report to the Central Committee from the Saratov oblast party committee illustrates, alcohol abuse not only resulted in legal violations, but also interfered with critical work on the farms and resulted in destruction of collective farm property. On one farm, the chairman organized a night of binge drinking with a brigade during spring planting. During celebrations of International Labor Day, May 1, the farm manager of another collective farm commandeered an automobile, drove to the city of Saratov, went on a binge, and wrecked the car.[83] In another case, drunkenness among workers of an MTS in Belarus resulted in major violations of labor discipline and serious bodily harm. "During work hours they make the rounds on their tractors from village to village in search of vodka, or leave the tractor in the field and go get drunk," officials reported. In one instance, a senior tractor operator fell from the machine and was seriously injured. Because of this, and the failure of management to combat it, "some tractor drivers have moved on to criminal acts, including fraudulent work orders (*pripiski*) for incomplete tasks."[84]

None of this indicates that theft of corn or any other commodity significantly contributed to the farms' underperformance. Instead, it indicates deeper problems in collective farmers' attitudes to labor, which resulted from their low pay. The peasants' attitudes toward the system, their "moral economy," told them that since they worked on the farm, they should receive in return food and the money they needed to pay taxes, buy consumer goods, build shelter, and more. In the absence of compensation from the farm for their labor-days, they sought it through illicit means. In addition, the prevalence of small-scale theft demonstrates that Soviet

[83] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 14, d. 107, l. 22.

[84] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 184, l. 68.

countryside was, far from subject to overwhelming state control, in reality comparatively undergoverned. Even on the level of a village or collective farm, local authorities had insufficient power to prevent theft or, once it took plate, to punish perpetrators even when they were known offenders.

* * *

Khrushchev needed to mend the system of labor incentives so that the collective farms would produce more, pay their workers better, and raise their productivity. These outcomes were necessary to fully realize his scheme to introduce industrial farming methods, to make corn the foundation for livestock raising, and, thereby, to provide the average citizen with a richer diet. Having paid bonuses for above-plan production, Soviet authorities tested guaranteeing pay and replacing the labor-day with a wage the farmer received in cash or in kind. In Stavropol krai, this began in 1957; by the early 1960s, this practice reached most collective farms. In late 1957 or early 1958, the head of the krai party committee, F. D. Kulakov, and of the soviet, E. S. Krotkov, wrote to the RSFSR Council of Ministers to advocate transforming the accounting, pay, and planning practices of the comparatively large and affluent collective farms of the krai. They proposed to implement "*khoziaistvennyi raschet*" (often shortened to *khozraschet*) or "enterprise accounting" to track expenditures and incomes, and thereby to calculate the production cost for the first time. Without this system, farms had little idea of their production costs. With it, they could measure which commodities brought net income and how, allowing them to adapt—within state procurement plans—their operations to efficiently produce the most output at the cheapest cost.[85] In the end, the authorities hoped to make production more efficient; thus these measures influenced the outcomes of farmworkers' efforts to grow corn, as well as to do many other important jobs.

This concern for cost and expenditure had been neglected under Stalin, but Khrushchev

[85] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7911, ll. 1–2.

expressed his interest in putting these principles into action. In October 1955, he responded to reports on accounting and production costs in the findings of the Ministry of Agriculture's delegation to the United States. "Look at what we've sunk to, that such a basic truth [determining production costs] for every farm has become some sort of special secret to discover," he said. In a capitalist economy, "this is a matter of life and death. It explains the irresponsibility that has plagued our system from top to bottom. Everyone behaves like a bureaucrat, and no one cares about the results."[86] In January 1954,he had expressed a similar thought more colorfully while complaining about the inefficiency of transforming grain into pork, which on state farms required a high ratio of eight units of feed to one unit of meat. "How does this happen?" Khrushchev demanded. Because, he charged, officials acted "wastefully" (*beskhoziaistvenno*) when disbursing resources such as feed. "Forgive me for my rudeness, but if this [state farm] were a commercial enterprise subject to the forces of capitalist competition, a farmer who spent eight kilograms of grain to produce one kilogram of meat would be left without pants. And here? The director of this state farm, well, his 'trousers are just fine,' as the Ukrainians say [the phrase, *"dobry shtani"*, is in Ukrainian], because he does not have to answer for this disgrace (*bezobrazie*)."[87] This critique, moreover, had roots in social scientists' efforts to understand Soviet rural society and to diagnose the economic problems of collective farms. In the 1950s, their findings, as historian Maya Haber shows, influenced Khrushchev and other decision makers.[88]

Farms could calculate production costs only by accurately measuring the amount and cost of the labor required to produce a basic unit of output. The old system prevented this

---

[86] RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 107, l. 262.

[87] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 1:170.

[88] Maya Haber, "Socialist Realist Science: Constructing Knowledge about Rural Life in the Soviet Union, 1943–1958" (PhD Diss., University of California–Los Angeles, 2013), especially chapter 4, "Measuring Socialism: The Development of Collective-Farm Taxonomies," 134–69, and chapter 5, "Agrarian Reforms between Socialist Realism and the Law of the Market," 170–99.

because the money value of a labor-day varied according to the goods and cash left over at the end of the season. Instead, accountants required a system of labor that paid collective farmers in money or goods equivalent to a specified sum.[89] Combined with a plan to pay a guaranteed minimum wage, this signaled a transformation in the relationship between collective farms and their peasants that had existed since collectivization. "The conditions exist," Kulakov and Krotkov wrote, "for the organization of [farms'] finances based on full implementation of *khozraschet*, calculating production costs, the financial results of production, and the clear income [*chistyi dokhod*]."[90] Furthermore, they explained, "a transition to money payments for the collective farmers' labor [might] increase [their] material incentives, and bring closer the pay systems of collective and state farms." They proposed slowly implementing this system, first on twelve economically sound farms over the next several years and in future years on the rest.[91]

The experiment began on farms in the Piatigorsk district. A pamphlet published in 1958 described to officials and collective farmers how the new system extended the normal process of "accounting" (*raschet*) that farms already used in settling debts to state agencies, such as procurements, taxes, loans, etc. The new approach applied that system to quantify production within each farm and within each brigade, allowing managers to determine where production brought a net profit, where it did not, and why. "The innovation is in adopting accounting within the collective farm itself, raising the responsibility of the brigade for the result of its economic activities, and in engaging each collective farmer in the struggle for economizing expenditures of labor, feed, fuel, etc." This procedure "illustrates the results of each brigade's work for collective farmers, and does not allow poorly working brigades to hide behind the broad shoulders of the

[89] The results of an experiment on a collective in Novo-Aleksandrov district that implemented *khozraschet* in 1958, found that the system would not work while labor-day system still existed. As a report about the farm explained, "The required effect was not achieved because labor expenditures, when expressed in labor-days, did not permit the brigade's leaders a clear impression of production costs and ways to decrease them." GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7576, l. 39.

[90] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7911, l. 1. For definitions of *chistyi dokhod* and related terms, see: Humphrey, *Marx Went Away*, 77–85.

[91] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7911, l. 2. For the list of farms, see: GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7459, l. 23.

whole collective farm; that is, to live on others' account." In the old method, "brigade leaders and collective farmers had no responsibility for nonfulfillment of plan production targets or excessive expenditures on labor."[92] The pamphlet established procedures for implementing the reform more broadly, outlining the case to the collective farmers: they should favor the reform because good workers stood to earn more by abandoning the labor-day system and its "leveling" tendencies (*uravnilovka*).

Authorities sought to reduce production costs of a ton of corn and, thereby, of meat or milk; they had to make those costs an indicator of a farm's success and to supplement old-style management that pursued only raw commodity output. They additionally abandoned the labor-day system to prevent collective farm managers from arbitrarily altering work norms. Theoretically, the new table was nonnegotiable: it outlined six classes of work and an appropriate money wage for each, adaptive to an individual farm's ability to pay, along with work norms for each category. Collective farmers were pressured to exchange higher work norms for a raise in pay and a guaranteed advance of approximately 70 percent of the year's planned wage, paid out each month in a prorated proportion of one-twelfth the total. Unlike the labor-day system, these new wages did not depend wholly on the leftovers at the end of the year, but instead as a set percentage of the farm's income. Experiments conducted in the 1950s suggested that the optimal share for wages was at least 40 but no more than 50 percent.[93]

Early on in the process, many meetings of collective farmers and of district party committees voiced concern about how the changes affected female collective farmers. Acknowledging that women often completed manual field labor such as weeding and harvesting corn—that is, work putting them in the first two of the six categories—some proposed raising those pay grades' monetary value for fulfilling a day's norm to overcome the fact that such

---

[92] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7576, l. 3.

[93] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7576, l. 41. Inspection in the middle of 1959 found that on Stavropol krai's collective farms this amounted to 42.5 percent of the total. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7902, l. 10.

"underqualified workers earned such low wages."[94] In the summer of 1959, an inspection showed that the 138 collective farms that had made the transition had little heeded such concerns. In general, the first category, across the board from low-paying, economically weak collectives to the wealthy ones, remained at a level one-half that of the highest pay category, the rate at which tractor drivers and specialists earned their wages.[95] In this, they simply recreated the inequality of the labor-day system, where tractor drivers and specialists earned labor-days at ratios at least 2:1 in comparison with manual laborers.

Regardless of the caution they first voiced, the krai's leaders directed a more widespread and hurried campaign in 1959. It achieved results, but also suffered setbacks. In May, Krotkov reported that, of the 146 collective farms in the krai, 141 of them (96.5 percent) had begun to transition to guaranteed money payments. This "extremely important measure" overcame the shortcomings of the labor-day. Krotkov offered an explanation for its obsolescence, saying that it "had played its positive role in the past, but now we're saying 'so long' to it."[96] Farm and district officials put these measures into practice but they often make mistakes. The head of the krai party committee's agriculture department, S. I. Maniakin, reported that almost all collectives had achieved "positive results" in the transition. They had "improved organization and raised labor productivity, increased material incentives, . . . and decreased unproductive expenditures." Nonetheless, he wrote, "spot inspections demonstrated that on the collective farms of certain districts, [officials] permit serious shortcomings to occur."[97]

One of these "shortcomings" illuminates how peasants could make demands on managers, reflecting the collective farmers' fears that they would, as they had for decades, be taken advantage of again. Accountants sometimes computed monthly payments based not on 70

---

[94] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7576, l. 55.

[95] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7902, l. 1.

[96] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7887, l. 3.

[97] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7576, l. 74.

percent of a monthly proportion of the expected annual total of wages, but on 100 percent. As a result, the farm would run out of money if the collective farm's income fell below the plan, a common occurrence given the vagaries of weather, disease, pests, and other variables. To compensate, the paymasters recorded in each farmer's pay book a figure representing one-twelfth a share of the whole expected wage, but paid her in cash or kind only 70 percent of that figure.[98] The peasants' relationship to the farm, as well as the way authorities comprehended the peasants become clear: farmworkers saw one figure in the records and received only 70 percent of that. Maniakin, expressing exasperation, wrote that that event "elicits unneeded rumors and doubts in the guaranteed nature of the collective farmers' pay."[99] In use on "several" collectives, this method nullified the advantages of the new system. Policy-makers intended the final 30 percent the nonguaranteed part of pay. It depended on the quality of the brigade's harvest and, therefore, on the sum of the collective efforts of brigade members to harvest and produce more. Maniakin elaborated, "To implement this differentiated . . . pay when the collective farmers are assigned a sum for the whole year's pay is impossible." [100]

This meant that, in Maniakin's terms, the "leveling" (*uravnilovka*) in the labor-day system that authorities hoped to eliminate remained when the new policy became practice. These cases might simply have been a case of poor accounting; however, the collective farmers repeatedly showed preferences for practices authorities denounced as leveling but which ensured that the farmers received their pay based on collective, rather than individual achievements.[101] Verbitskaia documents this general problem, arguing that the pay scheme

---

[98] Inspectors discovered similar problems even in 1960. A report pillories the party chief of Novo-Aleksandrov district for allowing similar percentages higher than 70, including collectives planning 92.4 percent, 83.65 percent, and 100 percent. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 95.

[99] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7576, l. 75.

[100] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7576, l. 76. Officials similarly feared the precedent that might emerge if collective farmers' wages rose too high, meeting or even exceeding those of state-farm workers. The latter, as state employees of an ideologically more pure form of enterprise, could not earn less for their work. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 101.

[101] GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 309, l. 2

inherited from Stalin had amounted to: "Everyone gets the same—very little."[102] Those benefitting from better land, operating advanced equipment, or assigned to grow crops that grew well and fetched a high procurement price were positioned to earn more under a system that differentiated wages. Those who did not have those advantages, however, could not make much. Moreover, long experience under Stalin had taught the peasants to prioritize the kinds of work that provided stable, reliable sustenance: the private plot. Moreover, they had justifiably come to understand that the collective farms were only intended to extract wealth from the countryside. Many peasants were unwilling to commit themselves to an intensive labor regime on the collective farm; they guarded their time jealously and continued longstanding preferences for the private plot. Thus they cared very little for incentives encouraging more intense labor, preferring to get a little in return for as little work as possible.

As late as 1963, the problem of matching collective farmers' pay to the productivity of their work remained a concern. The proceedings of a krai conference of economists on these issues outlined a solution for paying bonus payments above guaranteed wages, the money equivalent to a set percentage of the purchase price of the production beyond the plan, or the equivalent in kind of the commodity itself. Curiously, the percentages differed among products: for milk, meat, eggs, and similar products, it was 15 percent; for crops, 25 percent; for corn, however, the proportion reached a 50 percent premium.[103] After a decade of the corn crusade, Soviet authorities, far from tiring of corn, continued to introduce measures designed to encourage collective farmers to grow it.

The change in wage policies had to overcome collective farmers' decades of experience when, under Stalin, they had been subject to open coercion. Krotkov claimed that *mismanagement on the part of farm officials*—not the policies themselves—had caused peasants to loose faith in the new wage system quickly because it did not appear to the farmers

[102] Verbitskaia, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo*, 41.

[103] GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 309, l. 2

any different than the old. He denounced those who "did not change their approach" to labor and pay. He cited a farm where the chairman and accountant had failed miserably, distributing less than one-half the planned amount in January and nothing at all in February and March. "What kind of guaranteed pay is that?" he asked indignantly. "They claimed that there was no money; however, sometimes we not only have to trust comrades, but also to verify [their actions]."[104] Later inspections found some cases in which lack of funds explained the problem, but not in this case.[105] A call to the bank director revealed that the collective in question had received the money, but its management had used it to cover other costs instead of paying wages. To the collective farmers, nothing had changed. Speaking on behalf of the collective farmers, Krotkov bemoaned, "'As much as they cheated us before, now [the chairman] is still cheating us.'"[106] Even when the claimed shortfalls in funds turned out to have been real, peasants likely responded with similar exasperation. As the example of Aleksandrov district shows, that problem was widespread: there, the majority of collectives fell at least one month behind.[107]

The average collective farmer might easily detect duplicity in adapting the wage scales and work norms *after* a general meeting of collective farmers had approved them. Rain fell heavily in Stavropol krai in the early summer of 1959, with negative effects on corn, winter grains, and other crops. District and krai authorities pressured farm managers to alter basic features of the pay system to compensate, balancing their books to offset decreased earnings from smaller than expected harvests. A report to the krai's party and state leaders on collective farm finances demonstrates a marked change in plans. Farms had earmarked 39 percent of their income for pay and had guaranteed monthly advances of 78.7 percent of that figure. The actual

---

[104] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7887, ll. 5–6.

[105] See, for example: GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7902, l. 11.

[106] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7887, ll. 5–6.

[107] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7576, l. 77.

income was 339 million rubles (or 13.5 percent) short of the anticipated income of 2.5 billion rubles, requiring managers to "reevaluate wage rates, work norms, and the pay of management and service personnel." On the date of the report, the collective farms had already overspent the original budget for labor by some 112 million rubles; furthermore, this figure was 189.6 million over the new budget, adopted in light of the lower expected income. "Such incorrect management of the collective farm budgets," the report declares, "has been roundly denounced by the krai agriculture department, district agricultural inspectorates, district soviets, and district party committees."[108]

Managers of collective farms did not flout these orders lightly, but did so because they had to keep collective farmers working. Thus they paid wages first, especially once collective farmers' expectations for pay had risen in the late 1950s. To make up the difference, the farm managers declared their enterprises in financial difficulty and requested allowances from the state such as short-term credit and temporary relief from debt repayment. Krai officials describing the situation indignantly declared the managers' pleas "completely baseless."[109] This shows that collective farmers' pay after the reform still served as a shock absorber of sorts, allowing farms to mitigate negative effects of drought, flood, disease, and other unanticipated changes in income or expenditure. The state received its grain no matter what, but the peasants might see their "material incentives" fluctuate wildly from year to year. This encouraged rank-and-file collective farmers to mistrust this new, more equitable payment system as much as the old, nakedly exploitative one. The leaders of brigades and collective farm managers, therefore, had to negotiate with them to ensure that they would turn up in the fields to work. Guaranteeing their pay, even in a year of low yields and falling incomes, contributed to this effort. Weighing the consequences of failure, some farm managers preferred allowing wages to rise to charges that they had not fulfilled the plan. Krai authorities repeatedly bemoaned these practices.

---

[108] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, ll. 93–94.

[109] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 94.

"Unfortunately," one declared," even the leaders of district organizations, party and soviet officials, have developed the incorrect opinion that guaranteed collective farm pay should be paid without any attempt to economize or create reserves."[110] Krai officials became exasperated with collective farm managers, who had privileged keeping their workforce happy over staying on the budget as determined by *khozraschet*.

Collective farmers had little direct input into government and party policies, but their actions influenced the process by forcing leaders to respond to conditions on the ground. Collective farmers demonstrated their displeasure by refusing to go to work in the fields and, sometimes, even by leaving the farm altogether. In this case, they did so to express their approval of the guaranteed wages. In 1960, Novo-Aleksandrov district officials pressured farm managers to abandon the new system of pay. A report lambasting the district party leaders' "superficial leadership of collective farms" explains the situation on the Tel'man collective farm. "The district committee changed this collective farm, among the strongest financially, back to labor-days in the spring. Within two days the collective farm management was ordered to revert to money wages because the collective farmers refused to return to the old system of paying for labor."[111] Collective farm managers in the Karachai-Cherkessk autonomous oblast, an administrative subdivision within the krai for the two national groups, received criticism for "a dependent (*izhdivencheskii*) attitude" about labor and pay policies, meaning that they expected the shortfall to be made up on account of someone else, in this case the government.[112] The

---

[110] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 102.

[111] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 95. A common collective farm name, Tel'man is a Russianization of the family name of the interwar leader of the Communist Party of Germany, Ernst Thälmann, who died in a Nazi concentration camp in 1944.

[112] The adjective *izhdivencheskii* is difficult to translate because its root indicates status as a legal or material dependent, be it a child or person with a disability. In a Khrushchev-era context, it carried the connotation of someone who abused that aid, a denunciation of those who would supposedly lead an easy life scrounging from government aid, a "welfare mentality." Khrushchev used it to describe state-farm managers who, when they had failed to reap large harvests of corn, expected to purchase livestock feed cheaply from the state to make up the shortfall. It shares a root with the term "*izhdivinets*," used to describe the student Kirakozov.

report complained that the original plan had called for 50.9 million rubles in pay out of a total income of 149 million rubles. Expected income had fallen to 112.9 million rubles because of low yields, a 24.2 percent *decrease*, while guaranteed wages paid had *risen* to 59.5 million rubles, a 17 percent increase.[113] The officials considered this "a result of the fact that collective farm management and primary party organizations do not honor the collective farm charter and do not follow the production-finance plans as if they were law."[114] Instead, they were guided by a realization that, if they did not pay their workers, the farms would produce even less. Failure to pay full wages in a timely fashion caused farmers to stay home, but also to vote with their feet in a more dramatic manner. A report from Novo-Aleksandrov district records that conditions "did not allow settling accounts with the collective farmers on time, as a result of which labor discipline fell and even caused the departure of a substantial part of collective farmers to locations outside the district."[115] The letters arrived from other districts of the krai, showing that struggles over pay and labor discipline were general, rather than local.[116]

Despite cases of peasant discontent and refusal to work, these new policies appear to have noticeably improved labor-force participation. In the summer of 1959, an inspection found that the number of person-days worked had risen and more collective farmers were showing up in the fields. In the first two quarters of 1959, 11,800 more laborers worked at least one day, a rise of about 7 percent over 1958. They worked 2,153,100 more person-days, 11 percent more than 1958 and amounting to 4.5 percent more per worker. Officials judged this a positive result in light of labor shortages and noted that, more importantly, it had led to a jump in output: for

---

[113] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 98.

[114] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 99.

[115] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 119. This letter also suggests converting many of the collectives in the district into state farms, forgiving their debts, and lowering their plan for sunflower-seed procurements by 4,500 tons. A letter from the same district party chief to Kulakov, dated September 13, 1960, makes a similar case. It highlights in additional detail the three and five-month delay in paying monthly wages on the districts farms, which, the letter dryly explains, "negatively reflects itself in labor discipline."

[116] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 121.

instance, farms produced 22 percent more milk and eggs.[117] The number of person-days, which fluctuated based on weather and volume of work required, ranged from 285.5 million in 1957 up to 300.4 million in 1958 and then back down to 271.8 million in 1959.

As late as the summer of 1960, reports continued to register the same complaints. In one district, the krai statistical agency found problems with *khozraschet*, including basic questions of planning, executing, and overseeing pay. Despite earlier assurances that farms had completed the transition to guaranteed wages, *khozraschet* remained another matter: only two of the district's eight farms had completed the process, and one had not begun. The district party committee's admonitions achieved almost nothing, as farm officials paid little heed to their orders to begin with. The report cites the defense of one collective's senior accountant, who declared, "From January 1, 1960, to May 1, 1960, monthly *khozraschet* assignments [i.e. targets for production and economizing on labor and materials] were distributed for field work and animal husbandry. In actuality, these achieved nothing positive and, therefore, the brigades and departments refused to adopt *khozraschet*." A neighboring collective farm, by contrast, had put everything in order: it had distributed plans and met them, improving efficiency and lowering production costs.[118]

In August, a report from the chairman of another collective farm portrayed a transition far from complete, inhibited by the collective farms' other financial burdens caused by the period's other campaigns. This farm in Novo-Aleksandrov district had succeeded in paying its laborers for work only through April of that year, leaving it more than three months behind and owing more than 2.7 million rubles in back wages. The chairman claimed that the farm had a low rate of capital investment prior to 1958 and that, coupled with the low yields experienced as

---

[117] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7902, ll. 13–14. The results had become even clearer at the end of the year. Pay increased markedly while the number of days worked held steady, as annual household income rose from 4,749 old rubles in 1957 to 6,019 in 1959, or by 27 percent. Individuals' average wages rose from 2,315 rubles to 3,250 over the same period, or 40 percent. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8260, l. 16.

[118] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8260, ll. 47–50.

a result of excessive rainfall in 1959, had decreased income. It had made only 1.8 million rubles on the grain harvest, for example, rather than the planned 7.1 million. In addition to back wages, the farm owed a further 4.7 million rubles to the state, representing the balance resulting from pressure on collective farms to pay for equipment, bought when the MTSs dissolved in 1958, not over several years, but in an impossibly short timeframe. A report by local officials documents that this was a wider problem: "We consider that it was premature to seek to collect the full cost of the machines purchased. This removed the possibility for the collective farms to pay the collective farmers in a timely manner, and to create the bank balances necessary to pay future wages and production costs, which significantly harmed their financial security."[119] In addition to machinery purchases, the collective farms had to finance a plan to increase their livestock production at the expense of the primary source— collective farmers' private holdings. This largely consisted of discouraging individual livestock holding by purchasing peasants' cattle, sheep, and hogs. Thus the farm in Novo-Aleksandrov district had borrowed more than 2 million rubles of the 2.85 million required to purchase 767 cows. The coercive campaign took place behind the thin screen offered by claims that the collective farmers, happy with the pay they received for work on the farm, willingly ceded their private livestock and purchased milk from state shops. As the collective chairman put it, "Because of the requests and desires of the collective farmers to give up personal cattle, the management purchased them on a strictly voluntary basis."[120] In first quarter of 1960, the cost of these livestock crowded out savings, as well as loan repayments, eventually requiring a total 148 million rubles across the krai. Krai authorities blamed abuses on the district officials who had ordered the purchasing campaign.[121]

---

[119] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 101.

[120] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8260, ll. 56–57. Individuals had made such proposals as early as late 1958 and early 1959 in collective farm and district committee meetings. See: GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7576, l. 55.

[121] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 101. A similar report, from the much-maligned party chief of Novo-Aleksandrov district, declared that his district's farms had expended some 17 million rubles on purchases of machinery and livestock, as well as cost for their upkeep. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 119.

Krai authorities pursued the financial reform to institute *khozraschet* and replace the labor-day with a guaranteed income to achieve two goals. On the one hand, they aimed to clarify how much a farm spent to produce a metric ton of corn, a hectare of wheat, or a kilogram of pork. On the other hand, officials viewed the new system as a superior method of appealing to "material interests" by offering a steady and reliable wage. Both served the purpose of achieving higher labor productivity and stimulating their widespread use. Khrushchev's industrial farming principles required them to do this; they often failed due to poor management and ineffective labor practices

* * *

In an effort to consider labor, corngrowing, and everyday life at the micro level, this section concentrates on one farm in Stavropol krai. The V. I. Lenin collective farm was located in *stanitsa* Goriachevodsk, a settlement adjoining the Caucasus Mountains spa town of Piatigorsk.[122] The fact that the farm boasted a newspaper, published three or four times a month in a print run of 1,000, indicates it was large and successful. *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (Collective farm life) and its content portrays the farm as an economic unit large enough that each farmer knew few beyond her own brigade, a subunit within the farm that more closely approximated the size of whole collective farms in northern parts of the country. The paper was first published in 1957, a period when many large and wealthy collective farms around the country acquired semiregular newspapers. The first issue of *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* described its mission as an "operational auxiliary" (*boevoi pomoshchnik*) to the farm's party committee and

[122] The word "*stanitsa*" in the USSR denoted a type of rural settlement found in the North Caucasus, but the word was the historical legacy of the Cossack settlements common in the area. The *stanitsa* had been the basic unit of social and economic organization in a Cossack host under the tsarist regime. Additionally, the Piatigorsk area became famous as a place to take mineral-water cures in the nineteenth century, and as the site of the fatal duel fought by the writer Mikhail Lermontov in July 1841. I selected this farm because, although prosperous, it was not a "vanguard" farm; additionally, I found a nearly full print-run of its newspaper in the collections of the Russian State Library in Moscow.

managers, mobilizing and informing citizens by reporting on developments.[123]

The annual cycle of planting, cultivating, harvesting, and preparing for the new season structured each year's print run, and corn enjoyed a prominent position within that sequence. Corn's importance to the farm's operations, given the warm southern climate, is clear in the target yields for 1957 that the farm's chairman, K. I. Agnaev, urged collective farmers to fulfill pledges necessary in order "to catch up with and overtake America," as the campaign launched that spring required. Bringing in three or four metric tons of grain and twenty to twenty-five tons of silage per hectare, the farm would, in a stock phrase, "create a stable feed supply for socialized animal husbandry" and put itself among the most successful in the krai.[124] Each May, headlines exhorted those planting corn to plant faster, better, and begin cultivation in a timely and efficient manner. They announced a particular work team's pledge to "genuinely struggle for a high yield," and reminded farmworkers to "carefully attend to the corn, not breaking the rules of agronomy."[125]

As the season progressed into early summer, cultivation became the most important task, and the newspaper employed all means at its disposal to ensure everyone fulfilled their duties. This included public shaming. The newspaper's editors served as ombudsmen of sorts, allowing individuals and groups to bring an issue or problem to the attention of farm managers. For the 1957 season, the newspaper's content makes clear that, while the farm planted its cornfields with tractors and machines, cultivation required manual labor. "The [female] collective farmers in work team no. 1 care for their plots, but six have not yet begun," a story, written by the brigade leader, explained. "M. Boiko, a member of the work team, has not been

---

[123] "[Untitled]," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (May 5, 1957): 1.

[124] K. I. Agnaev, "[Untitled]," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (May 5, 1957): 1. The chairman took to the newspaper's pages a month later, explaining the task of catching up, and the farm's plans to meet its contributions to those tasks as part of five-year development plans. K. I. Agnaev, "[Untitled]," *Kolkhozanaia zhizn'* (June 5, 1957): 1.

[125] L. Egorova, "Po-nastoiashchemu borot'sia za vysokii urozhai," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (May 1, 1958): 2; and "Zabotlivo ukhazhivat' za kukuruzoi, ne narushat' pravil agrotekhniki," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (June 10, 1958): 1.

seen in the fields for three weeks. The brigade's members hope that the work team of Comrade Miasoeva will not hold the whole brigade back, making it lag behind the vanguard work teams in caring for corn and other crops."[126]

Naming and shaming those who violated social customs was common not only in the cornfields. The newspaper singled out individuals and groups who violated a whole range of norms in work and daily life. Stories frequently condemned instances of drunkenness, while others reported the consequences of such transgressions, especially sanctions imposed by the collective farm's management.[127] The method was calculated to both prevent recidivism by the offenders, and to warn other residents of the penalty for bad behavior. The offenses noted were not always so severe: in some cases, individuals broke social norms.[128]

Repeat offenders or culprits in more serious crimes might find their cases before the criminal-justice system. For example, several drivers collaborated to steal 158 kilos of sunflower seeds, sell them, and use the money to go on a bender.[129] This incident illustrates a problem that brings corn back into focus: theft, as this chapter has shown, was a major problem, but not sufficient to account for more than a tiny fraction of low productivity. Theft of corn was most common during the harvest, when crops neared their maturity. In August 1957, a story

---

[126] I. Sokolov, "Ne otstavat' ot peredovikov," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (June 5, 1957): 1.

[127] A typical case in the Lenin collective involved three of the farm's drivers, a class of worker whose independence from oversight allowed them leeway to carry out petty theft, falsifying records of their work, sell fuel on the side, and more. Three of them received disciplinary action for frequent drinking bouts: one was fired, another assigned to different work, and a third earned a fine of five labor-days. "Na pravlenii kolkhoza," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (May 25, 1957): 2.

[128] On a state farm in another corner of Stavropol krai, a brigadier was indicted on the pages of the farm's newspaper for profane language, captured in a cartoon and a ditty:

Kul'turnym stal i trud i byt,	Labor and daily life have become cultured.
Dlia kul'turnogo rosta – vse usloviia.	An environment exists for cultural growth.
No ne khochet kul'turnym byt'	This master . . . of foul language,
Etot mastr . . . [sic] skvernosloviia.	Does not want to be cultured.

The newspaper then asked the managers of the farm to "bring this master into line." "Kondrashev raspoiasalsia," *Rossiia* (July 11, 1959): 2.

[129] "Na pravlenii kolkhoza," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (September 25, 1957): 2.

denounced a worker at one of the farm's dairies for stealing feed, and demanded he be brought before the management for punishment: "S. Lutsenko was caught on the night of July 31 in the cornfield planted for silage, where he was harvesting corn for his own cow. People say that this is not the first incident in which S. Lutsenko has 'procured' feed in this manner."[130] That September, the management stipulated that any collective farmer caught taking even a little corn from the fields would not receive any bonus pay for that year.[131]

Despite evident challenges, the V. I. Lenin collective farm was a large and apparently profitable one: In August 1962, chairman Agnaev, received a *pochetnaia gramota*, an honorary certificate of merit, from the krai party committee and soviet. Writing in support of Agnaev's nomination, the secretary of the district party committee described the farm and its successes in production. From the accompanying biography of Agnaev, a picture of the farm itself emerges: trained initially as a teacher, Agnaev had entered service as the director of the local MTS during the krai's recovery from German occupation. Large harvests and efficient operations followed. In 1955, in a final round of Khrushchev's collective farm amalgamation, Agnaev became chairman of one of the two farms that remained from the original twenty-two served by the MTS. That year, the collective comprised 2,000 households and 4,700 people, of whom 62 percent qualified as able-bodied. (The rest were children, disabled, or retired.) The farm had 13,000 hectares of cropland, and produced 12,000–15,000 metric tons of grain annually, as well as fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and eggs in large quantities. By 1962, the farm's production had risen substantially: its planned harvest of corn (35 tons per hectare), as well as output of 1,468 tons of meat (or 2.5 times the 1955 figure) and 5,430 tons of milk (or 2.4 times the 1955 figure), proved to party officials the effectiveness of Agnaev's management, which the district secretary characterized as "honest" and "conscientious."[132] Although large, profitable, and in good

---

[130] A. Dranov, "Za potravu posevov – k otvetu," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (August 5, 1957): 1.

[131] "Na pravlenii kolkhoza," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (September 25, 1957): 2.

[132] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, 8830, ll. 17–18.

standing with the krai leadership, the farm had to continue to raise production and to combat theft and drunkenness.

To increase output, the farm participated in local corngrowing competitions against the nearby "*Proletarskaia volia*," or "Will of the Proletariat," collective, considered one of the finest in the territory. The Lenin collective farm had several farmers whom its newspaper held up as examples for others both in work in the cornfields and in life. One of them, N. I. Kaplun, led the work team that grew the largest harvest of corn, spearheading the farm's efforts to best its neighbors in corngrowing. Taking to the pages of *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'*, the farm's party secretary praised the organized daily life Kaplun led, his caring approach to work, and his attentiveness to fellow party members and collective farmers facing hard times.[133] In other instances, the newspaper prioritized the appeal for higher output: an editorial during corn-cultivating season entreated everyone to follow the example of Kaplun, as well as E. Ul'ianik, a young woman considered the best corn grower in the "Will of the Proletariat" collective.[134] Kaplun's name appeared on the "Honor Roll," a list of exemplary workers published periodically—as well as a physical billboard in a public place—for all to see.[135] The example of Kaplun, Ul'ianik, and others contributed to naming and shaming: newspaper articles admonished those whose enthusiasm and commitment flagged. In June 1957, one said, "One must ask the brigade leaders, Comrades Zozuli and Morgatyi . . . when they will organize an actual socialist competition among the work teams for raising high yields of corn and other crops. The collective farmers, of course, do not want to lag behind in this important event begun by the work teams of N. Kaplun and E. Ul'ianik."[136] In fact, Kaplun became the object of attention for the whole territory, if not beyond,

---

[133] P. Kovtun, "Kommunist dolzhen byt obraztsom vo vsekh otnosheniiakh," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (February 15, 1958): 2.

[134] "Posledovat' primery zvenevykh E. Ul'ianik i N. Kapluna," *Kolkhoznaia zhzin'* (May 25, 1957): 1. For others, see: "Na puti k izobiliu," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (November 7, 1957): 1; and "N. I. Kaplun – nastoiashchii chelovek!" *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (November 7, 1958): 1.

[135] See, for just one example: "Doska pocheta," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (June 15, 1957): 1.

[136] "Sorevnovanie kukuruzovodov," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (June 25, 1957): 1. Similarly, the farm participated

when a team from the North Caucasus Documentary Film Studio arrived to shoot footage of his work and life.[137]

Comparisons with the "Will of the Proletariat" collective farm encompassed other areas, including social problems. At a meeting of the Lenin collective farm's management to summarize the results of the first half of 1959, speakers singled out Comrade Nevreev, head of the corps of drivers who had caused so many problems, for failing to discipline his workers, and particularly one who crashed one of the farm's Moskvich compact cars while drunk driving.[138] Head of one of the corn-growing work teams and a vanguard worker in her own right, a Comrade Fabrova complained that this was not a problem in "Will of the Proletariat" farm. "Much has been said about thieves, drunks, and moochers who are of no use to the collective farm," she noted, asking, "Why do they not have any cases of theft on the 'Will of the Proletariat?' Because there, all members of the collective look after collective property. . . . We must follow the example of the collective farmers of 'Will of the Proletariat' farm and establish . . . oversight so that no one gets in the habit of carrying off [property]."[139] Given that petty theft and alcohol abuse were pervasive, it is difficult to imagine that the neighboring farm had no problems at all; however, because there was little day-to-day contact between the farmworkers, it served as an example for goading those who might violate discipline into compliance.

On January 1, 1959, the Lenin collective farm made the transition from labor-days to guaranteed payments. A report on an "open" party meeting—one the public could also attend—described this transition. It highlighted the importance of "material incentives" designed to improve discipline and quality. Agnaev extolled the farm's economic strength: milk production

---

in territory-wide competitions of this type, including in 1959. See: "Zadaniia semiletki – za odin–tri goda!" *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (January 15, 1959): 1.

[137] "[Untitled]," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (August 5, 1957): 2.

[138] See other denunciations of this man: "Narushiteli i ikh pokroviteli," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (November 19, 1959): 2.

[139] P. Fabrova, "Vsem, kak odin, borot'sia s nedostatki," *Kolkhoznaia zhzin'* (August 15, 1957): 1.

had grown 42 percent since 1955, and corn plantings from 1,570 hectares to 2,435, while yields more than doubled, from 2.08 metric tons per hectare to 5.63—a yield that compared favorably to American averages of the period. He then outlined the new six-tiered system of assigning pay and labor norms: the former amount of work that earned one labor-day would earn thirteen rubles, the second of six grades. One paid lower than thirteen, and the highest at twice that level, while machine operators could earn bonuses boosting their pay to thirty-nine rubles. Finally, he outlined stipulations for the farm's particular bonuses: "To reward corngrowers' achievements, a brigade or work team overfulfilling its planned yield will earn ten extra rubles for every tenth of a metric ton of corn over five tons." Here, too, the leaders of the collective pointed to the example of the neighboring "Will of the Proletariat" collective farm, which had shifted to this system earlier, perhaps as one of the experimental farms in 1957.[140] "Material incentives" made the most out of a tough growing season the farm faced in 1959. A special set of rewards outlined for corn-growing work teams and brigades offered them bonuses for grain and silage, above and beyond their usual pay.[141] The collective farm, furthermore, had just purchased equipment from the MTS: 56 tractors, 32 combines, 300 implements of various sorts, 60 trucks, and 7 cars. Additionally, electrification, irrigation, and various other means of production were constructed in 1958, suggesting the ongoing modernization and industrialization of the farm's production.[142]

Farm managers' efforts to clarify the new system in the newspaper and at meetings notwithstanding, some collective farmers grumbled about its results. Six months into the experiment with guaranteed payments, some dissatisfied farmers maintained that the new system, just like the old, robbed them of earnings. In response, the farm's chief accountant took to the newspaper to justify the system to "Those who say that pay is too low," as the article's title

---

[140] "Novaia sistema oplaty truda – put' dal'neishego pod"ema," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (December 23, 1958): 1.

[141] "Pooshchreniia za vyrashchivaniia vysokogo urozhaia kukuruzy," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* 3, no. 21 (June 1, 1959): 1.

[142] "[Untitled]," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (January 1, 1959): 2.

put it. The potential to earn a guaranteed wage, along with efforts to stock the farm's stores with goods and provide the farmers access to commodities such as grain at the state's procurement price, ensured that those who worked made a fair wage that allowed them to purchase necessities. Addressing the complaints, he took as an example a collective farmer—not by chance a woman, given their typically lower wages. She had made only 423 (old) rubles in a month and deemed this too little. However, when broken down by the number of days worked and the daily wage, according to the farm official, this was equitable. For the nineteen days in the month she worked, she earned a wage of 23 rubles per person-day, or nearly double the amount considered the value of one labor-day. However, those nineteen days were only 73 percent of the working days in the month, so if she had worked the full twenty-six days, the monthly wage would have amounted to 579 rubles.[143]

The reformed system still had glitches. Because of "mistakes" in planning payments, "wages were distributed among the collective farmers of each brigade at the same level, irrespective of their individual fulfillment of the production plan. A leveling was carried out. . . . As a result of this, and also because the farm did not fulfill its plan for money income [due to too much rain], the farm's management did not implement cost accounting (*khozraschet*) in the brigades."[144] Moreover, the collective farms of the krai did not fully put the system in practice, as the common charges of "leveling" demonstrated. Yet officials also voiced concern about the rates of pay and variation among them. They feared that peasants would become dissatisfied if the wages for the same work diverged widely from one collective farm to the next. For example, some collective farms paid as much as 37 percent more than others in the same district for the same work.[145] Again, these troubles indicate the indirect influence collective farmers' preferences had over wage practices.

---

[143] "O tekh, kto govorit: 'Zarplata mala,'" *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (June 20, 1959): 2.

[144] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8260, l. 84.

[145] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8260, l. 102.

Other evidence further indicates that this system was not completely successful, as in the case of the Lenin collective farm's fifth brigade. In past years one of the farm's best, the brigade completed its tasks in a timely fashion and even helped other brigades that fell behind. In July, however, Agnaev criticized it for lagging in cultivating corn and cutting hay. Nothing had changed; new machinery, in fact, had made production potentially more efficient. "The whole reason they trail is the group's falling labor discipline and in its organization." The party and brigade leaders became, in boilerplate language, "self-satisfied" and allowed their workers to shirk work on the collective farm. Of the 450 workers in the brigade, 259 of them were assigned to work in the fields, a typical proportion. The problem arose from the fact that of those, only 70 or 80 turned out for fieldwork regularly. As a result of the actions of a "certain undisciplined element" among the workers, labor progressed slowly, while many complained about their low pay which, as the farm's accountant had attempted to prove in June, resulted from a failure to work the full number of days.[146]

The new pay, labor, and accounting policies reveal much about the day-to-day operation on farms, and the pressures to which managers, farmers, and district officials alike responded. A financial analysis of the Lenin collective farm demonstrates *khozraschet* at work. It outlines the practices on the farm and highlights the ways in which practices on the farm differed from the ideal. "The brigades themselves formulate the production plans," as standard procedure required. "However, the *kontrol'nye tsifry* [the figures for the most important categories of production] are distributed from above by the farm management," a measure that was, while not formally approved, widespread.[147] The plans had to appear as if they had started at the bottom, directly in the brigade, but that was not actually the case even after planning reforms. "After formulating the production plans, the brigades submit them to the collective farm

---

[146] K. I. Agnaev, "Prichina otstavaniia? – Plokhaia ditsiplina!" *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* (July 23, 1959): 2.

[147] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8260, l. 93. For more on this practice and its commonality, see: Humphrey, *Marx Went Away*, 161.

management for review and approval. The collective farm managers then adjust these brigade plans," the report concludes. This indicates that managers both shaped the plan at the beginning and altered it unilaterally later in the process. Everything points to a similar relationship between the farm management and district authorities, and the district authorities and their krai superiors.[148] For example, one report denounced district committees for ordering the farms to trim nonproduction expenditures. Constructing schools and clinics, as well as providing social services, was necessary, but had to wait until the farm was in a position to cover the cost without harming its production capacity.[149] Finally, "on the basis of the brigade production plans, confirmed by the management, enterprise-accounting tasks are formulated, approved, and distributed to the brigades."[150] Here, the authorities noted a failure—or unwillingness—on the part of managers to implement a differential system of pay that allowed bonuses to those individuals and brigades with superior results.[151]

* * *

The activities of the Lenin collective farm show that a transition took place in the late 1950s from manual to mechanized labor in cultivating corn. In early February 1959, a series of articles raised awareness of the importance of machines for cultivating corn. On February 19, the newspaper's editorial declared the Lenin farm "On the march for the corn harvest!"[152] At a general meeting of representatives of each part of the farm, one brigade leader spoke about how efforts in 1958 to cultivate corn without manual labor had achieved good results, mirroring the nationwide campaign to adopt the methods associated with A. V. Gitalov, N. F. Manukovskii,

---

[148] Humphrey, *Marx Went Away*, 316.

[149] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8262, l. 100.

[150] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8260, l. 93.

[151] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8260, l. 95.

[152] "V pokhod za urozhai kukuruzy," *Kolkhoznaia zhzin'* (February 19, 1959): 1.

and others.[153] In all, the farm formed twelve such work teams that year.[154] In June, the time to remove weeds from the corn plantings, problems became apparent as the fields became overgrown with weeds. Using the typical martial language, *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* declared, "Comrade collective farmers! The battle for a high yield of row crops has entered the decisive phase. . . . Rainy weather has caused weeds to grow quickly, so we must devote everything to their elimination!"[155] The results of an inspection, however, show that this was an aspiration, rather than a fact. An official from the Piatigorsk city party committee described how the fourth and sixth brigades had fulfilled their tasks, but others, such as the first, had fallen behind. In the fields belonging to one mechanized work team, the weeding was of poor quality. The leader of the team complained of machinery in poor repair, especially of dull blades on their cultivators. Despite "many requests to the chief machinist, Comrade Prutkov, to replace them, he remains deaf to our appeals. Thus we save a few kopecks and lose hundreds of rubles." And the inspector found that this was the case, and not only in the first brigade, a situation leading to "instances of shoddy work."[156]

The corn campaign reached its apogee, measured in terms of number of hectares cultivated, in 1962, as Khrushchev's pressure to cultivate the crop using full mechanization grew. This also proved true in Stavropol. Although policy since the December 1958 plenum, these measures required significant efforts to spread, and factories produced the necessary machinery slowly. In late December 1961, the Central Committee's Bureau for the RSFSR distributed a directive entitled "On the spread and wide adoption of the vanguard methods for raising high yields of corn and sugar beet without resort to manual labor, according to the

---

[153] Sibirtsev, "Uchest' proshlegodnye oshibki," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* 3, no. 6 (February 7, 1959): 2.

[154] A March report to the krai party committee confirms these efforts, including the formation of thirty-three corngrowing brigades, of which thirteen—an increase of one—were mechanized. GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 7923, l. 117.

[155] "Tovarishchi kolkhozniki!" *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* 3, no. 22 (June 9, 1959): 1

[156] A. Ponomarenko, "Chto pokazala proverka," *Kolkhoznaia zhizn'* 3, no. 22 (June 9, 1959): 1.

method of V. A. Svetlichnyi and V. Ia. Pervitskii, machine operators in Krasnodar krai." This longwinded order required attention from each party committee, not least of which in neighboring Stavropol krai. In March 1962, the krai authorities reported to the Central Committee Agricultural Department about the campaign: the krai's newspapers, its radio, and its television had broadcast information about the new effort. Study of the required approach in "schools of vanguard methods" had advanced far, as 334 individuals had gone to learn alongside Svetlichnyi himself. The change in the way corn was cultivated is clear in the figures reported: a tiny number of individuals: 774 work teams, encompassing as few as four and as many as ten operators and drivers, pledged to cultivate 377,000 hectares of corn, or an average of 487 hectares apiece.[157] It is clear that this was a major change from practice most common in 1955, when one person took responsibility to weed at most one or two hectares.

Despite this progress, difficulties remained. "In addition to the vanguard farms," the krai party committee announced, "in Shpakovskii district there are also serious shortcomings in preparation for and planting of corn in the necessary timeframes." The officials blamed the fact that work went on in one shift, not two. Workers often stood idle because machines malfunctioned or the soil in the fields was unprepared. On the "Zaria" collective farm, one team "badly regulated its planter, so that the seeds were poorly placed and not planted at the proper depth, and as a result the squares and clusters—required to eliminate weeds between the rows in both directions—were imprecise. Some machine operators had not learned to operate a new model of planter, and thus they did not use it at all in planting." Local party bosses poorly oversaw work, did not raise the issue at their meetings, did not visit the farms, and used a "formalistic, cautious approach to the organizing planting."[158] To achieve the necessary results, officials required that "corn cultivation be at the center of the district party committee's attention," and that it "take measures for the mobilization of the entire able-bodied population

[157] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8833, ll. 54–55.

[158] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8594, ll. 18–19.

for carrying out cultivation of row crops."[159] These descriptions echo those of the opening phases of Khrushchev's campaign: the equipment was new, but the difficulty in ensuring efficient operation remained much the same as eight years before.

In March 1963, F. D. Kulakov spoke to a krai conference on agricultural development and outlined what he saw as the continued problems with an agricultural system that struggled to implement—or was against implementing—Khrushchev's ambitions for industrial farming. The krai party boss naturally framed his critique in terms of the day's ideological line, that this was "the period of full-scale construction of communism." This required not slow, incremental developments, but revolutionary change, Kulakov said. He cited Khrushchev: "'Now we must double, triple output and not in forty years, but in just a few.'"[160] To make that happen, everything had to be transformed overnight, Kulakov continued, "In organizing production, in labor and pay, and in management methods we retain much that is outdated, backward, and conservative, useful for extensive use of the land [i.e. not intensive, industrial farming practices]. All this holds back productive forces, holds back the rapid development of agriculture." [161] He then outlined ways farms in the krai had failed to adopt innovative methods. Although he did not use the term, they were industrial farming technologies. Most importantly, he denounced what he viewed as inflated expectations for pay, without concomitant gains in production. He chided, "We must ensure that each farm pays all its workers in relation to the quantity and quality of their output."[162]

Other officials addressed their areas of specialization, such as land management and crop rotations. Another krai party committee official evaluated the changes in pay. From the first experiments with eliminating the labor-day system and instituting cash wages, there had

---

[159] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 8594, l. 23 and l. 26.

[160] GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 307, l. 1.

[161] GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 307, l. 3.

[162] GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 307, l. 6.

been problems. The norms and plans on which this system rested came from the authorities late and were "not based on accurate, rigorous information, but [were] calculated roughly [lit. "*na glazok*," or "by eye"]."[163] Finally, another official concluded that all of these reforms, although still in progress, "were based on the effort to expand material incentives for agricultural workers to boost agricultural output."[164] Kulakov warned his audience, "The system of pay for labor is determined by the character of production. We must remember that production influences pay, but pay, in its turn, makes labor more productive, and therefore this issue should be at the center of attention."[165] Here again, Soviet officials reinforced the connection between technology and productivity per hectare of land and person-day worked, all measures central to industrial farming.

Kulakov's description of the situation for rural citizens as consumers brings us to pressing concerns of the end of Khrushchev's leadership, to the charges leveled against him by the former comrades removing him from power: his policies had not improved collective farmers' living standards. Whereas the desperation evident in 1953 was past, in 1964 the peasants' problem was frustrated expectations. Charging that Khrushchev's policies failed to solve rural workers' problems, his former comrades blamed lagging agricultural output on him. In particular, they attacked his pay policies: "The problem of farmworkers' material incentives (*material'naia zainteresovannost'*) has not been solved," they declared. "Comrade Khrushchev has delivered many speeches and signed numerous memoranda, but the results have been insignificant." In 1958, a collective farmer earned an average of 1.56 (new) rubles a day, but only 1.89 rubles in 1963.[166] The conclusion of Khrushchev's opponents that a wage increase of 20 percent was insignificant is suggestive of just how depressed wages had been before 1958, but

[163] GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 307, ll. 41–43.

[164] GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 307, l. 56.

[165] GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 307, l. 60.

[166] Artizov, et al., eds., *Nikita Khrushchev*, 189. Both figures are given in the new ruble, introduced in January 1961, which redenominated at a rate of 10 old rubles to 1 new.

also that Khrushchev's policies and public pronouncements had raised expectations. Collective farmers produced more and earned more, but the assumption was that their potential for higher output and earnings had risen faster than actual measurements of either.

In terms of collective farmers' lives, the changes in both the availability of goods and the rise in their expectations were visible. In 1963, Kulakov stated, "We know that supplying bread and other foods is an important material incentive for collective farmers not only because they are in the habit of stockpiling grain, but also because even a ruble earned cannot buy all needed goods in the state trade network."[167] It violated peasants' sense of justice that they should produce goods such as meat and milk, but not have access to them in local shops. In 1960, the chairman of a *stanitsa* soviet in Stavropol krai, wrote a letter to Khrushchev describing how life was getting better for the collective farmers: "In the stores, you can buy whatever manufactured goods you want; there's bread and flour, too."[168] Because their private plots were too small, peasants did not grow grain, but instead vegetables. They therefore had to acquire bread or flour through the collective farm in return for their labor as an in-kind payment, or use their income to purchase it in state stores; they might also sell private-plot produce in the collective farmer market to earn the necessary cash.[169] Grain was one thing, but milk and dairy products were another, because they were unavailable in rural stores. "It's not good that every year our *stanitsa* ships a large quantity of milk to the towns, but for some reason milk products do not make it to our stores," the chairman lamented. He explained that inquiries to the authorities revealed that no one had ordered the sale of milk products in rural areas. "I think that this is not right (*ne sovsem pravil'no*) . . . that [collective farms] sell [milk] to the state and only enough to raise calves remains on the farm, but nothing for use on the collective farm, not even for the nursery."

---

[167] GANISK, f. 5351, op. 1, d. 307, l. 60.

[168] GASK, f. 2395, op. 5, d. 560, l. 2.

[169] A collective farmer's plot ranged in size depending on region, but .4 hectare was a common measure. This fraction of a hectare, amounting to 4,000 square meters, or a square with sides of 63 meters, approximately equal to the English system's acre.

"Nikita Sergeevich!" he concluded, "I ask you to tell us how to solve the problem of supplying the people with milk products."[170] These statements suggest that peasants' motivations were comprehensible if considered in terms of their sense of justice—their moral economy. They responded to "material incentives" not because they wanted to raise production to achieve some abstract goal or to ensure future abundance, but because they hoped to earn more money and to procure goods that they could not produce for themselves.

* * *

This examination of labor, mobilization, and material incentives has demonstrated the evolution of the system that Khrushchev inherited from Stalin. After 1953, coercion declined in severity and frequency because it had proven ineffective. In principle and largely in practice, unpaid labor on the collective farms became a thing of the past. Threats and punishments remained, but neither had as great an effect as might be imagined. Peasants did not fear punishments because the meetings of collective farmers refused to vote to confirm them, or because the sanction did not disadvantage them or threaten their vital interests. Thus many expelled from the collective farms kept their private plots anyway. Similarly, punishments for violations such as theft and drunkenness, although potentially severe, saw only sporadic enforcement. Rather than a serious detriment to farms' output, these acts were symptoms of deeper dissatisfaction that decreased productivity. Moral incentives, as chapter 5 suggested, succeeded in some small way in demonstrating to the collective farmers that their labor had value, a contrast to Stalin-era policies that made their status as second-class citizens apparent. Some of that reality, however, held over into the Khrushchev period, when peasants continued to live without pensions and internal passports, improvements that became a reality only in the era of L. I. Brezhnev.

Material incentives to work on the collective farm increased. Tens of thousands of

[170] GASK, f. 2395, op. 5, d. 560, l. 2.

peasants working on collective farms in the postwar period had received in return nothing but the right to a heavily taxed private plot. By the mid 1950s, however, reforms had curbed the worst of these abuses. Beginning in wealthy regions such as Stavropol krai and eventually across all oblasts and farms, pay became monthly, rather than a conditional, uncertain, and rare occurrence. These changes in the collective farmers' lives did not make them efficient cultivators of corn. The evidence supports the conclusion that under Stalin the state had subjected the peasants to a "ruthless" labor regime that robbed them of mobility and control over their labor. The system of collective farms struggled under Khrushchev, as Roy and Zhores Medvedev have argued, in part because the collective farmers had little avenue for personal initiative, but also little incentive to fully commit to planting, cultivating, and harvesting corn—or any other crop.[171] The lack of machines and unfamiliarity of corn did constrain the productivity of early efforts to grow it, but even by the early 1960s, when those technologies became common, labor productivity lagged.

Life in the Soviet Union's rural communities improved during the Khrushchev period. Goods remained difficult to "acquire," yet there were more of them than before. As the charges against Khrushchev's policies leveled against him in October 1964 suggest, this was not only a problem of policy and of carrying it out, but also one of raised expectations. The party expected ever-higher production and rates of growth outpacing the rate of investments as farms brought latent capacity into production—for example by replacing low-yielding crops with high-yielding corn. This was the central idea of Khrushchev's vision of industrial farming, and he enshrined it in policy documents, including the Seven-Year Plan (1959–65) and the Third Party Program. Urban dwellers expected to consume more meat, milk, and eggs, to buy them more cheaply, and to find greater variety and quantity of other goods in the shops, too. Rural dwellers similarly expected their lot to improve. More mechanization and other capital investments raised productivity, but not sufficiently to realize Khrushchev's vision. This left his promises to the

[171] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 182–83.

peasants—just like those to urban consumers—only partially fulfilled, giving rise to dissatisfaction.

CONCLUSION

In early 1958, party and government officials in western Russia's Smolensk oblast requested funds to consolidate the tiny villages scattered across the forested countryside into larger ones because the state did not procure its expected share of the output of the surrounding land. The 8,515 settlements in the oblast were organized into 860 collective farms and 78 state farms. Some 2,983 (35 percent) had fewer than 15 households (or *dvory*, sg. *dvor*, consisting of a collective farmer's house, outbuildings, and private plot). After campaigns in the late 1940s and 1950s to amalgamate small collective farms into larger ones, these settlements were as much as several kilometers away from the farm managers. Telephones were rare and road connections were poor, and therefore the peasants in those communities lived beyond the immediate reach of authorities. To illustrate the problem, oblast officials cited the example of the hamlet of Galeevka, one of the 541 settlements that had fewer than five homesteads. Galeevka was located three kilometers from the offices of the brigade, itself a subdivision of the Karl Marx collective farm. Of the twelve collective farmers making up the four families in Galeevka, only two fulfilled the annual labor-day quota. The crops they grew went to waste from the state's point of view: the peasants cultivated only 26.6 of 49 hectares, and the state procured from 14 hectares of rye a total of only 1.5 metric tons. The peasants had taken the remainder of the rye, as well as all the wheat grown in a field of four hectares. They also kept more livestock than the law allowed, and sold neither meat nor milk to the state.[1] To gain a share of the output and labor of the residents of these outlying settlements, oblast authorities petitioned Moscow for funds to incorporate these 25,890 households into existing villages.[2] The USSR Council of

[1] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 14, d. 106, l. 22.

[2] They estimated the cost at 3,000–5,000 old rubles apiece, giving the project a cost of 130 million rubles.

Ministers approved the proposal on the grounds that it would "enhance the collective farms' economic health," but required the collective farms to foot the bill.[3]

Galeevka was an extreme case: the cities would not have been fed if all collective farms had fallen so far outside the state's control. However, the situation represented a microcosm of the Soviet countryside and the state's control over society; or rather, the limits of it. Try as they might to reshape people, economies, society, and basic interactions with the natural world, especially agriculture, Soviet leaders did not easily realize their ideals of high modernism—to use James Scott's term—and prometheanism, suggesting that they had less dominance over society and nature than they supposed, and scholars have long presumed. Sometimes, as in the case of these Smolensk oblast officials, they acknowledged barriers to their capacity to govern efficiently and reconstruct the world according to their vision of socialism; their efforts to do so, however, speak volumes about the way the Soviet system worked.

In this dissertation, I have argued that the actions of Khrushchev, of ministers, of local authorities, of collective farm managers, and of collective farmers themselves combined to further the leader's plans, but just as often to hold them back. These individuals and groups, including the Smolensk oblast leaders and the villagers of Galeevka, enabled the system to function and permitted the dysfunction that constrained it, leading to the underperformance of agriculture, of industrial technologies, and of corn. By acting within the system's boundaries, and by pushing against them, these actors augmented already formidable climatic and technical challenges, making certain the underperformance of farms. A rigid hierarchy, an uncontrollable society, an uncooperative officialdom, and the formidable diversity of local conditions made the system resilient and flexible, and therefore highly difficult to meaningfully reform.

Corn did not fail because it was a "harebrained scheme," was self-evidently unfit for the

---

At the official exchange rate and adjusted for inflation, 3,000 rubles amounts to a little more than $6,000 in 2013, and the total to some $263 million.

[3] RGASPI, f. 556, op. 14, d. 106, l. 29.

USSR on the grounds of climate, was too technically challenging for farms, or for any other single reason. True, it confronted all of these limitations and more. The leader's impetuous nature; management practices ingrained in the system; disobedient local officials; farm managers; the peasants themselves; and—although many analyses have overemphasized them—technological and climatic constraints all combined to cause the apparent failure of the corn crusade. I use the words "apparent failure" to describe its outcome because, although it is true that collective and state farms did not achieve the yields Khrushchev anticipated, the industrial farming principles he advocated provided the basic doctrine for subsequent agricultural development. In other words, Khrushchev's campaign itself failed, but it succeeded in introducing principles that subsequently defined Soviet agricultural policy and investment.

The climate did hamper Khrushchev's endeavor. When planted in areas with an unsuitable climate, corn required farmers to apply best practices, use technologies effectively, and complete work in a timely fashion. Reflecting unacknowledged assumptions about the unsuitability of corn, collective farmers and managers often did none of these, making certain that corn did not produce well, and thus fulfilling their expectations. Corn did not grow in the far north, a fact Khrushchev often, but not always, recognized. Nonetheless, even in regions where it had the potential to succeed, such as Krasnodar krai, the Moldavian SSR, and southwestern Ukraine, farms brought in smaller harvests than they might have, leading to a decade of small harvests and disappointing output. Corn struggled because it was unfamiliar to farmers, as were the techniques Khrushchev selected for growing it.

Moreover, the Communist Party and Soviet state governed the countryside with difficulty because peasants continued everyday practices that hamstrung Khrushchev's reforms. Through their labor and interactions with the collective farms, peasants saw to their own interests and reacted to policies affecting their lives, both of which shaped future policies. As second-class citizens, collective farmers maneuvered within the collective farm system to gain advantages. They stole corn, performed needed labor begrudgingly, and pursued their individual interests,

actions that required local and higher authorities to respond. To motivate farmers, authorities reformed wages in hopes of raising labor productivity, a goal only partially realized by 1964.

Archival evidence also shows that the local officials and farm managers hypothetically in charge of carrying out Khrushchev's policies were similarly uncontrollable. As a result, the corn crusade did not meet his expectations, and officials' unwillingness to follow his agricultural program hampered the leader's offensive to bring industrial farming technologies to the countryside. His reforms thus did not achieve the high output and labor productivity he imagined, or that which the foreign models on which he drew suggested was possible. Habits endemic to the Communist Party and Soviet government bureaucracies also limited the practical authority Khrushchev had over policy. Even potentially useful policies floundered because the centrally planned economy and the inflated bureaucracy built into the system under Stalin circumvented Khrushchev's attempts to reshape them. Bureaucrats pursued their own ends, ignoring or even contravening superiors' orders while creating the appearance that they had complied with the given moment's campaign. Officials fulfilled corn-planting plans, but neglected to see that the crop yielded the feed that it might have. Farms planted on the least productive land, applied no fertilizer, sent insufficient numbers of collective farmers to weed it, refused to use scarce agricultural machines to cultivate it, and harvested it too early in the season, before it was fully mature. Any one of these practices might have resulted in a small harvest, which confirmed the skepticism of the crop common among officials and the populace. Local authorities likewise used duplicity to conceal low yields, making change in republics, krais, oblasts, and districts more difficult. In Lithuania, the local party and government perpetrated mass fraud by reporting that they had plowed up their pastures and planted corn, while actually preserving the orthodox crop rotations better suited to the local climate. Thus center-periphery relationships also complicated carrying out the corn crusade.

Khrushchev's actions and rhetoric deserve a substantial measure of blame. Soviet political culture made the leader's word law. Worse still, the First Secretary berated anyone who

advised caution, brooking no opposition to his policies. His preference for corn became an ideological article of faith, and consequently alternative crops did not receive a hearing. Thus at a conference in Stavropol in the rush to plant corn everywhere in 1955, when an agronomist spoke in favor of sorghum, a crop better suited to the hot, dry conditions of the krai, no one paid attention because his technically sound suggestion contradicted the party line.[4] Demands to expand corn plantings fivefold in 1955 alone gave officials and farmworkers little time to prepare, resulting in low yields that gave the corn crusade an inauspicious start. In 1957, 1958, and 1959, Khrushchev escalated demands for the high yields needed "to catch up with and overtake America," which resulted in mass fraud and scandals, rather than the large harvests of corn and plethora of meat dairy products he expected. His campaigns against the standard grassfield system of crop rotations, or *travopol'e*, introduced still more uncertainty into land management and farm operations. Requiring farms to replace pastures with corn grown using capital-intensive industrial farming methods, his policy put potentially more economical and sustainable solutions at a disadvantage. Although it later bore fruit, his program after 1961 to apply more synthetic fertilizers and chemical herbicides had too little time to succeed in the few years of leadership he had left. The institutionalized mania for corn as a panacea forced farms to neglect seeds, machinery, and techniques for growing a range of crops that, together with corn, might have solved the fodder problem.

Despite Khrushchev's seemingly rash decision to make the USSR a corngrowing nation, he did not choose the crop on a whim. I have argued that Khrushchev consistently pursued an approach that was part of a global trend in agriculture. Developing the parts of industrial farming already present in the Soviet system, he furthered reforms based on the models of industrial farming he saw spreading around the globe. Information gleaned by sending delegations to the US helped make modern agriculture the foundation for Soviet farming practices. Consequently, the USSR followed a path of technological development related to that

[4] GANISK, f. 1, op. 2, d. 6539, l. 42.

of other industrialized countries in the postwar period. Khrushchev also envisioned grafting these methods to the socialist system in hopes of making the USSR a model that might spread to newly independent countries of the Third World, giving his ideals some influence over developments in what became the Green Revolution. Khrushchev's globally-inspired plan to put industrial farming methods to use on collective and state farms was a sound one, but his own failings and those of the uniquely Soviet system doomed them to underperform.

The practices that limited corn harvests were widespread and chronic problems. In December 1964, months after Khrushchev's ouster, two economists, M. Ia. Lemeshev and B. Solov'ev, wrote to the Central Committee to offer an analysis of Soviet corn cultivation and to plead for official backing to publish their book on it. Each worked at Gosplan's Economic Research Institute, where Lemeshev headed a department and Solov'ev was a senior researcher. Their institutional backing and connection to Gosplan indicates they had access to the best information available—although even that data was problematic. Making their case to the country's new leaders, they highlighted the policy's failure "to properly account for various regions' natural and economic particularities, as well as the farms' material and technical capacities. As a result, techniques for cultivating the crop were adopted formulaically (*shablonno*)."[5] Noting the ubiquitous propaganda devoted to corn, they considered the impression it created harmful, because it publicized only the positive examples of a few "vanguard" farms.[6] Lemeshev and Solov'ev offered data to support their argument that corn was an economic disaster because officials had forced farms to plant it despite inappropriate climate, with no accounting for costs, and without ensuring that the collective and state farms could plant, cultivate, and harvest the crop in a timely fashion. Analyzing each locale's prospects, they found that even in regions with hospitable conditions, such as southwestern Ukraine or

[5] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, l. 84.

[6] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, l. 149.

Krasnodar krai, harvests remained alarmingly small.[7] Even in places and years with favorable weather, much corn was harvested before it ripened. Typically as much as 50 percent of the cropland was harvested prior to "milky-wax maturity," meaning that the feed harvested had only one-half the nutrients and calories of hay and pasture grasses, and it cost more to produce. In some years, as much as 70 percent of the crop was harvested in this way.[8] Furthermore, the economists found that silage yields actually fell after Khrushchev's efforts between 1958 and 1964 to lower production costs by introducing more machines to do the work required to grow corn.[9] Lemeshev and Solov'ev drew three conclusions about why farms harvested the crop so early: first, they lacked the machines needed to do the work, a result of the bureaucracy's mismanagement of the task of manufacturing these implements. Second, the farms' supplies of livestock feed began to run short in late summer since they had largely replaced their pastures—on which they traditionally fed livestock during that season—with corn at Khrushchev's instigation. They therefore had to harvest corn to maintain a feed supply. Third, the farms faced time constraints imposed by the crop rotations of southern regions, where winter grains followed corn. This meant that farms had to harvest and plow the fields, as well as plant the wheat, before frosts came, a further incentive to bring corn in early.[10]

Thus Khrushchev, the government, and local officials share blame for the farms harvesting the corn at this stage; the corn crusade did not live up to expectations because of interacting technical, political, climatic, and economic reasons. Despite this, Lemeshev and Solov'ev concluded that the USSR should not abandon corn production. It had promise in warm regions such as the Moldavian SSR and parts of Ukraine, as well as on irrigated land in a wider

[7] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, l. 92.

[8] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, ll. 86–87.

[9] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, l. 88.

[10] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, ll. 89–90.

range of drier regions.[11] In most locales, however, they prescribed a return to the grasses that Khrushchev had rejected, repairing the damage caused by high expenditures to produce corn and the resulting low yields.[12] They insisted that nothing should be done "formulaically," and that efforts to reduce corn plantings should not swing to the "opposite extreme."[13]

These conclusions and recommendations are recognizable in the policies, if not the rhetoric, that followed. Soviet farms did not forswear corn, as some scholars have suggested by wrongly claiming that corn receded into obscurity following Khrushchev's removal. In fact, it remained a regular feature of the farm economy, albeit one far less prominent in propaganda. After reaching a peak of over 37 million hectares in 1962, the amount of corn planted began to fall. Khrushchev's statements and official statistics alike bear this out, showing a 20 percent reduction in 1963 and 1964. In December 1963, Khrushchev conceded that farms should use synthetic fertilizer and chemical herbicides on whatever crop local conditions favored, not automatically on wheat, corn, sugar beets, or any other single crop. "Why is Khrushchev, who agitated so much for adopting corn, now sounding the retreat?" he asked rhetorically. "We must not be afraid to reevaluate crop structures and, if necessary, to limit corn planting in dry zones and plant high-yielding varieties of wheat, barley, pulses, and sorghum." Instead of seeing corn, or structural reforms, or any other single program as the one solution, he promoted a package of measures designed to "intensify" production, getting more out of labor and capital by more fully realizing industrial farming principles. Nonetheless, he still expressed enthusiasm for corn: "This is not relevant to irrigated lands. On irrigated lands, corn gives higher yields than any other crop."[14] Medvedev and Medvedev incorrectly conclude that the declining hectarage of 1963

---

[11] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, l. 146.

[12] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, l. 97.

[13] RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, l. 103.

[14] Khrushchev, *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR*, 128. Lemeshev and Solov'ev support this conclusion, finding that whereas wheat produced only 28 percent more on irrigated lands, corn yields were some 220 percent higher. RGANI, f. 5, op. 45, d. 368, l. 101.

and 1964 gave way to a subsequent precipitous decline: "The crop had become so unpopular during Khrushchev's time in office that in 1965 the amount planted fell below the 1940 level. Even those [collective farms] where it had been a success now refused to plant corn! Silage corn decreased at a double rate."[15] Yet Jasny reports that plantings in 1940 were just 2.4 million hectares, all for grain.[16] Official statistics published at the end of the 1960s place the total amount of corn planted for grain in 1965 at 3.2 million hectares.[17] The sudden disappearance of the relentless agitation for corn meant that officials had no incentive in 1965 to overstate this figure. Medvedev and Medvedev may have intended to highlight that the *percentage* of cropland devoted to corn had fallen to equal that of 1940: because Khrushchev had expanded the total cropland, 3.2 million hectares was 1.4 percent of the total, equal to the proportion of 1940. The Medvedevs' claim, however, leaves out the much larger number of hectares planted for silage and green fodder. Far from falling radically, these amounted to some 20.2 million hectares in 1965, a decline from the peak reached in 1962, but similar to other recent years. For instance, the 1965 figure was only 2.9 million hectares less than that for 1960. Official statistics further confirm that the 3.2 million hectares planted for grain in 1965 was the lowest annual total for any year in the remainder of the decade: by 1970, it had risen to 4.2 million hectares. Silage plantings to produce livestock feed persisted, declining only by about 10 percent, from 20.2 million hectares in 1965 to 18 million in 1970.[18] Plantings for grain fell to just under 3 million hectares in 1980, but rebounded to surpass 4.5 million in 1987.[19] In 1980, farms planted 17.2

---

[15] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 128. Later, they write, "In the spring of 1965, when the farmer was given freedom of choice, corn acreage sharply decreased." Ibid., 182.

[16] Jasny, *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*, 141.

[17] USSR Council of Ministers Central Statistical Department, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSSR*, 119.

[18] Ibid., 119–130.

[19] USSR Council of Minsters Central Statistical Department, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSSR: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: "Finansy i statistika, 1988), 70

million hectares of corn for fodder, a figure that grew to 18 million hectares in 1987.[20] Corn grows today in the fields of most post-Soviet states. In the Russian Federation, for example, plantings for grain rose from 798,000 hectares (.9 percent of the total cropland) in 2000 to 2.06 million (2.7 percent) in 2012, while plantings for feed declined from 3.7 million hectares (4.3 percent) to only 1.4 million hectares (1.8 percent) over the same period.[21] Reports of corn's demise were greatly exaggerated. It was only Khrushchev's career that had come to an end in 1964.

Corn was and remains a prevalent part of the culture in post-Soviet states, where people continue to associate Khrushchev with corn and corn with Khrushchev. The Soviet 1960s were defined in part by the ubiquity of corn propaganda. Aleksandr Genis and Petr Vail' describe the atmosphere of the period: if the USSR had to overtake America, it would do it in just three years; and "if corn must be planted, then plant it from the subtropics to the Arctic." This they ascribe to Khrushchev's "impulsive dogmatism."[22] This legacy of the era finds many contemporary forms: his nickname, *kukuruznik*, remains in place. Souvenir nesting dolls *[matroshki]* depicting historic Russian leaders from V. I. Lenin to V. V. Putin include a grinning Khrushchev with an ear of corn in his hand. Marketing Thaw-era kitsch to diners, a restaurant in central Kyiv complements period cuisine with appropriate décor, complete with images of corn adorning the front door, which serves as a portal into the Soviet past. The post-Soviet press often runs stories about Khrushchev's fascination with corn.[23] It even has been captured in marble: in Krasnodar

---

[20] Ibid., 192

[21] Federal'naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo, okhota i okhotnich'e khoziaistvo, lesovodstvo v Rossii: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Rosstat, 2013), 76–77. The total grain crop in 2012 was 8.2 million metric tons, or 4.2 tons per hectare. In Ukraine in the same year, farms harvested 4.3 million hectares of grain with an average yield of nearly 4.8 tons per hectares, for a total harvest of 21 million tons. Combined, the two countries produced 3.5 percent of the global output of 849.8 million tons. The crop also grows in Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan, and the five countries of Central Asia. Source: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, FAOSTAT, http: //faostat.fao.org.

[22] Vail' and Genis, *Shestidesiatye*, 203.

[23] For some of the many examples, see: A. Muravlev, "'Potemkinskaia' shtabka dlia Khrushcheva," *Al'taiskaia pravda* (April 17, 2009); G. Petrov, "V SShA vspominaiut Nikitu Sergeevicha," *Novye izvestiia*

krai, the local association of seed corn producers erected a statue to Khrushchev in May 2005 bearing the dedication, "To the great champion of corn." The local response was mixed: the older generation recalled the era's spaceflights and queues for bread, while the young simply shrugged their shoulders. Reflecting on the Khrushchev era's legacy of optimism, the chairperson of the association named his generation "children of corn," oddly mirroring M. S. Gorbachev's description of his generation of reformers as "children of the Twentieth Party Congress."[24] Rather than ending abruptly in October 1964, collective memory of corn and the Khrushchev era finds expression in post-Soviet fields, restaurants, and public monuments.

The Krasnodar seed corn producers' enthusiasm notwithstanding, Khrushchev and his policies have been generally reviled in the five decades since his fall. Agricultural policies have fallen on the negative side of the scale, while his moves to empty the labor camps and pursue de-Stalinization contribute to the positive attitude of some.[25] This resulted from politics of his removal and his successors' efforts to condemn his policies. When the corn crusade and programs to adopt industrial agriculture did not meet his expectations, he denounced the leviathan bureaucratic machine he nominally controlled. His ceaseless and intense criticism of the apparat portrayed them as responsible for the spasmodic functioning of the economy, lax administration, and Riazan-style scandals. Collaborating to oust Khrushchev with nearly universal support from the Central Committee and bureaucratic elites, his former comrades

---

(August 28, 2009): 2; A. Gasiuk, "V Aiove po-russki," *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (August 31, 2009): 5; O. Sul'kin, "Khrushchev, syn Khrushcheva," *Itogi* (June 28, 2010): 32–39; P. Romanov, "Stavka na tsaritsu polei," *Izvestiia* (September 3, 2010): 22: B. Zolotov, "Vot by Khrushchev poradovalsia," *Kubanskie novosti* (August 14, 2013). Former Moscow mayor Iurii Luzhkov recently suggested that corn might again become a priority for farmers in the region around Moscow: O. Nikol'skaia, "Kukuruza vnov' tsaritsa polei" *Vechernaia Moskva* (April 21, 2008).

[24] S. Perov, "Ot blagodarnykh 'detei kukuruzy'," *Novye Izvestiia* (May 24, 2005): 7.

[25] In April 2013, Russia's Levada Center, an established public opinion and polling organization, found that Khrushchev ranked fifth of seven twentieth century leaders, with 6 percent of Russian respondents describing their attitude as "positive" and 39 percent "more positive than negative." This placed him ahead of only Gorbachev and former President of the Russian Federation B. N. Yeltsin, and behind Brezhnev, Lenin, Stalin, and the last tsar, Nicholas II. "Otnoshenie rossiian k glavam rossiiskog gosudarstva raznogo vremeni," Iurii Levada Analitical Center (May 22, 2013), http://www.levada.ru/22-5-2013/otnoshenie-rossiyan-k-glavam-rossiiskog-gosudarstva-raznogo-vremeni.

expressed their own opinions of Khrushchev's policies: "adventurist," "irresponsible," "ill conceived," "irrational," "unscientific," and more. In a twist of fate, the 1964 growing season that followed the previous year's disaster produced a bumper crop, but the representatives of the apparat pressed home their attack on Khrushchev. They explained away the previous five disappointing years by heaping blame on Khrushchev's leadership and policies alone, shifting attention from themselves and the apparat. The speech of G. S. Zolotoukhin, party secretary of Tambov oblast, at the Central Committee plenum on agriculture in March 1965, captures this point:

> An anti-Marxist, subjective, volunteerist approach to agriculture has been allowed in recent years, causing much damage. At plenums, in print, and in directives it was mistakenly reported that our farms had everything, or nearly everything, needed for development. Every problem was the fault of the local officials themselves, who have become scapegoats. At the same time, fundamental questions of agriculture have not been resolved. Force was used. Speeches were pronounced about local initiative, but nothing was done. A scientific approach, an analysis of the actual state of things was supplanted by harebrained scheming [*prozhekterstvo*]. Because of this subjective approach, no one in the planning agencies ever defended the interests of agriculture or paid attention to the needs of this fundamental economic sphere. From year to year, they trimmed finances as well as material and technical aid, while attempting to extract as much wealth as possible.[26]

Khrushchev's name remained absent from the indictments—as it would until the era of Gorbachev's reforms—but the message was clear. Zolotoukhin and the others reversed Khrushchev's charges that local authorities had failed to bring sound plans to fruition, turning the now disgraced former First Secretary into the scapegoat for all that ailed Soviet farms. Ukrainian party boss P. E. Shelest stated at the same plenum, "Violation of the laws of economic development resulted in adventurist policies. We all know the slogans 'to catch up with and overtake in a few years the USA in meat and milk production' . . . and 'today we live well, and tomorrow we will live better.' And yet there are lines for bread."[27] Although they contain a grain of truth, the charges assigned no culpability to the system, or to the party officials whom

[26] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 780, ll. 104–5.

[27] RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 780, l. 72.

Zolotoukhin or Shelest represented. Having ousted Khrushchev in October 1964, the new leaders reassessed the situation confronting farms. Their attacks on Khrushchev notwithstanding, they continued the Soviet Union's embrace of the industrial-framing principles Khrushchev had promoted with such vigor: they invested in machines, chemicals, infrastructure, and other projects, achieving modest returns in meat, milk, and eggs during the 1960s and 1970s. They even let farms continue to plant corn.

Nevertheless, the apparat's representatives helped define conventional evaluations of Khrushchev. Official Soviet histories of the Brezhnev period blamed the First Secretary for agricultural failings without ever naming him. Even nonconformist accounts reflected this stance: dissident historians Roy and Zhores Medvedev considered Khrushchev's early policies reasonable, and later ones ill conceived and impossible to implement.[28] During Gorbachev's reforms, conservative critics such as I. V. Rusinov savaged Khrushchev's initiatives in terms derived from the apparat's critique. He wrote in an official journal of Communist Party history about three "superprograms" (the Virgin Lands, corn, and livestock) that by each failing individually constituted a further collective "failure," amounting to a total of four.[29] Textbook explanations of the corn crusade emphasize climatic and technical factors and Khrushchev's blindness to them. One concludes, "Khrushchev's 1955 scheme to turn vast areas of arable earth into Iowa-like cornfields to feed both livestock and humans turned sour because of unsuitable soil and climate and popular resistance to eating corn. . . . Agriculture remained the weakest link in the system."[30] Historical analyses emphasizing Khrushchev's overwhelming authority and the powerlessness of others capture only some of the problems, while reflecting the assumptions of

---

[28] Medvedev and Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, 117–28.

[29] Rusinov, "Agrarnaia politika KPSS," 43.

[30] Catherine Evtuhov and Richard Stites, *A History of Russia since 1800: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 437.

the Central Committee plenums of October 1964 and March 1965.[31] With the benefit of insights that archival access allows, I have found that Khrushchev deserves some blame, but so do the Soviet system and the bureaucracy. As the success of his policies' counterparts abroad suggests, Khrushchev's agricultural initiatives had the potential to provide the abundance he envisioned; Soviet farms' inability to do so reflects the weaknesses of the system. Indeed, the Soviet Union increased its investment in agriculture under Brezhnev, but also expanded its grain imports.

That system, and its weaknesses, remained in place, resisting measured and cautious reforms under Brezhnev, such as those associated with Premier A. N. Kosygin. The problems of labor and productivity facing Khrushchev in industry, and especially in agriculture, presaged those confronted by Gorbachev. When the Soviet reformer, who first became engaged in politics as a Komsomol and Communist Party official in Stavropol krai beginning in the late 1950s, launched his initial program in 1985, he introduced the concept of "the human factor" alongside "acceleration" and "perestroika," his efforts to restructure the economy and modernize productive capacity. He announced efforts to make social and economic relations more closely reflect the needs of people, to reduce the importance of command and control, and replace them with ideals and incentives that would reinvigorate the socialist system.[32] In April 1985, Gorbachev stated that he envisioned changes "making sure that every person works on his job conscientiously and to the best of his ability."[33] These first reforms proved insufficient because the leader and his advisors did not understand the economic problems at hand.[34] They did reflect, however, legacies of the formative period of their political lives. As Moshe Lewin found,

---

[31] I. E. Zelenin, for instance, acknowledges that others shared blame, but privileges Khrushchev's power, authority, and actions. Zelenin, *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva*.

[32] Martin McCauley, *Gorbachev* (New York: Longman, 1998), 57.

[33] M. S. Gorbachev, *Selected Speeches and Articles* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 19.

[34] McCauley, *Gorbachev*, 66. These initiatives, as political scientist George Breslauer and others show, were the first stages of what became a revolution designed to democratize society and dismantle the command economy only in 1987 and 1988. George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56.

the concept "human capital" had been present in the writings of Soviet social scientists since the 1960s. The lessons of the Khrushchev era were there, as Lewin put it, "in the idea that people, the basic capital of the nation had to be treated appropriately." This encouraged "profound changes in existing relations of authority and hierarchy" in both the workplace and society as a whole.[35] Thus the Khrushchev decade, the previous era when a new leader challenged the system's ingrained traditions, influenced the ultimate effort to reform the flawed Soviet system.[36]

---

[35] Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 97–98.

[36] As historian David Nordlander showed, renewed interest in Khrushchev's reforms reflected the priorities raised by Gorbachev's own reforms. Challenging the Brezhnev era doctrine on Khrushchev's "subjectivism" and "volunteerism" that mandated twenty-five years of silence about the old leader, new viewpoints finally appeared in print. For more on this link, see: Nordlander, "Khrushchev's Image in the Light of Glasnost and Perestroika," *The Russian Review* 52, no 2. (1993): 248–64.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARCHIVES:

Central Archive of the Socio-Political History of Moscow [*Tsentral'nyi arkhiv obshchestvenno-politicheskii istorii Moskvy*, TsAOPIM].

Central State Archive of Moscow Oblast [*Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Moskovskoi oblasti*, TsGAMO].

Central State Archive of Social Organizations of Ukraine [*Tsentral'niy derzhavniy arkhiv hromads'kykh ob'iednan'* Ukraïny, TsDAHOU].

Lithuanian Special Archive [*Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archivas*, LYA].

Russian State Archive of Contemporary History [*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii*, RGANI].

Russian State Archive of Documentary Films and Photos [*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv kinofotodokumentov*, RGAKFD].

Russian State Archive of the Economy [*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki*, RGAE].

Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History [*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii*, RGASPI].

State Archive of the Contemporary History of Stavropol Krai [*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii Stavropol'skogo kraia*, GANISK].

State Archive of the Russian Federation [*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, GARF].

State Archive of Stavropol Krai [*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Stavropol'skogo kraia*, GASK].

NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALS:

Altaiskaia pravda (Barnaul)

Argumenty i fakty (Moscow)

Itogi (Moscow)

Izvestiia (Moscow)

Kolkhoznaia zhizn' (st. Goriachevodsk, Predgornyi district, Stavropol' krai)

Komsomol'skaia pravda (Moscow)

Kukuruza (Moscow)

Kubanskie novosti (Krasnodar)

Molodoi leninets (Stavropol)

Narodnoe obrazovanie (Moscow)

Novye izvestiia (Moscow)

Pravda (Moscow)

Rossiia ("Rossiia" state farm, Prikumskii district, Stavropol' krai)

Rossiiskaia gazeta (Moscow)

Sel'skaia zhizn' (Moscow)

Sel'skoe khoziaistvo (Moscow)

Sovetskaia Litva (Vilnius, Lithuania)

Stalinets (s. Kol'tsovka, Vurnar district, Chuvash ASSR)

Vechernaia Moskva (Moscow)

Washington (DC) Post

DOCUMENT COLLECTIONS, MEMOIRS, AND PUBLISHED SOURCES:

Artizov, A. N., V. P. Naumov, M. Iu. Prozumenshchikov, Iu. V. Sigachev, N. G. Tomilina, I. N. Shevchuk, eds. *Nikita Khrushchev: Stenogrammy Plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty*. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2007.

Emel'ianov, I. E. ed. *Kukuruza: Bibliograficheskii ukazatel' otechestvennoi literatury za 1794–1959 gg*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva sel'skogo khoziaistva SSSR, 1961.

Federal'naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki, *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo, okhota i okhotnich'e khoziaistvo, lesovodstvo v Rossii: Statisticheskii sbornik*. Moscow: Rosstat, 2013.

Fursenko, A. A., ed. *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954–1964*, vol. 1, *Chernovye protokol'nye zapisi zasedanii: Stenogrammy*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004.

Gavrilin, D. E. *Kukuruza i ee izuchenie v shkolakh i detskikh domakh: Posobie dlia uchitelei*. Moscow: Ministerstvo prosveshcheniia RSFSR, 1955.

Gorbachev, M. S. *Selected Speeches and Articles*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986.

Heikal, Mohamed. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

Kharlamov, M. A. and O. Vadeev, eds. *Litsom k litsu s Amerikoi: Rasskaz o poezdke N. S. Khrushcheva v SShA, 15–27 sentiabria 1959 goda*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1960.

Khlevniuk, O. V., ed. *Regional'naia politika N. S. Khrushcheva: TsK KPSS i mestnye partiinye komitety, 1953–1964 gg*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009.

Khrushchev, N. S. *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*. Edited and translated by Strobe Talbott. Boston: Little, Brown, 1974.

———. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, vol. 2, *Reformer (1945–1964)*; vol. 3, *Statesman (1953–1964*). Edited by Sergei N. Khrushchev, translated by Stephen Shenfield and George Shriver. University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2006–2007

———. *Stroitel'stvo kommunizma v SSSR i razvitie sel'skogo khoziaistva*, 8 vols. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1962–1964.

"Khrushchevskie vremena: Neprinuzhdennye besedy s politicheskimi deiateliami 'velikogo desiatiletiia'; A. N. Shelepin, V. E. Semichastnyi, N. G. Egorychev; Zapisi N. A. Barsukova." In *Neizvestnaia Rossiia XX vek*, vol. 1, edited by V. A. Kozlov, G. A. Bordiugov, S. I. Vakunov, I. S Davidian, S. M. Zav'ialov, and N. V. Teptsov, 270–304. Moscow: "Istoricheskoe nasledie," 1992.

Kovaleva, N. V., A. V. Korotkov, S. A. Mel'chin, A. I. Stepanov, and Iu. V. Sigachev, eds. *Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, 1957: Stenogramma iiun'skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty*. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1998.

Lenin, V. I. *Polnoe sobranie sochenenie, 55 vols*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1958–1965.

Leonov, N. S. *Likholet'e*. Moscow: "Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia," 1995.

Letopis' gazetnykh statei. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznoi knizhnoi palaty, 1936–.

Letopis' izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva. Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia knizhnaia palata, 1944–1966.

Letopis' zhurnal'nykh statei. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vsesoiuznoi knizhnoi palaty, 1926–.

Loshchenkov, F. I. *Ot Stalina do Gorbacheva: Zhizennye nabliudeniia*. Iaroslavl': Izdatel'stvo LIA, 2000.

Mar'iakhina, I. I. , *Shkol'nikam o kukuruze i kormovykh bobakh: Posobie dlia uchashchikhsia sel'skoi shkoly*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstva prosveshcheniia RSFSR, 1963.

Matskevich, V. V. *Chto my videli v SShA i Kanade*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1956.

Mikoian, A. I. *Tak bylo: Razmyshleniia o minuvshem*. Moscow: Vagrius, 1999.

Molodezhi o kukuruze: Populiarnyi ocherk. Vologda: Oblastnaia knizhnaia redaktsiia, 1955.

Programma kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo soiuza: Priniata XXII s"ezdom KPSS. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1964.

Shelest, P. E. *Da ne sudimy budete: Dnevnikovye zapisi, vospominaniia chlena Politburo TsK KPSS*. Moscow: Edition Q, 1995.

Shepilov, D. T. *The Kremlin's Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics under Stalin and Khrushchev*. Edited by Stephen V. Bittner. Translated by Anthony Austin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Shevchenko, A. S. *Kukuruza: Dlia obmena opyta dveri shiroko otkryty*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sel'skokhoziaistvennoi literatury, zhurnalov i plakatov, 1961.

Shturman, Dora and Sergei Tiktin. *Sovetskii Soiuz v zerkale politicheskogo anekdota*. London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1985.

Smirnov, G. L. "Malenkie sekrety bol'shogo doma: Vospominaniia o rabote v apparate TsK KPSS." In *Neizvestnaia Rossiia XX vek* vol. 3, edited by V. A. Kozlov, S. I. Vakunov, I. S Davidian, S. M. Zav'ialov, I. N. Malikova, L. L. Pushkova, N. V. Teptsov, and N. A. Tesemnikova, 361-82. Moscow: "Istoricheskoe nasledie," 1993.

Solzhenitsyn, Alexander. *The Solzhenitsyn Reader: New and Essential Writings, 1947–2005*. Edited by Edward E. Ericson, Jr. and Daniel J. Mahoney. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006.

Tomilina, N. G., A. N. Artizov, L. A. Velichanskaia, I. V. Kazarina, M. Iu. Prozumenshchikov, S. D. Tavanets, eds. *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Dva tsveta vremeni; Dokumenty iz lichnogo fonda N. S. Khrushcheva*. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 2009.

USSR Council of Ministers Central Statistical Department. *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSSR: Statisticheskii sbornik*. Moscow: Statistika, 1971.

———. *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSSR: Statisticheskii sbornik*. Moscow: "Finansy i statistika," 1988.

XIII s"ezd Vsesoiuznogo leninskogo kommunisticheskogo Soiuzna molodezhi: Stenograficheskii otchet, 14–18 aprelia 1958 g. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo TsK VLKSM "Molodaia gvardiia," 1959.

ONLINE RESOURCES:

Iurii Levada Analytical Center. http://www.levada.ru.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, Population Estimates and Projections Section. http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm.

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, FAOSTAT. http://faostat.fao.org.

United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, Technical Cooperation Programme Kazakhstan. http://www.fao.org/tc/tcp/kazakhstan_en.asp.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Agarev, A. F. *Tragicheskaia avantiura: Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Riazanskoi oblasti, 1950-1960 gody; A. N. Larionov, N. S. Khrushchev i drugie; Dokumenty, sobytiia, fakty*. Riazan': Russkoe slovo, 2005.

Aksiutin, I. V. and A. V. Pyzhikov. *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo: Problema liderstva i transformatsiia vlasti*. Moscow: Nauchnaia Kniga, 1999.

Anderson, Jeremy H. "A Historical-Geographical Perspective on Khrushchev's Corn Program," 104–28. In *Soviet and East European Agriculture*, edited by Jerzy F. Karcz. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967

———. “The Soviet Corn Program: A Study in Crop Geography.” PhD diss., University of Washington, 1964.

Bailes, Kendall E. “The American Connection: Ideology and the Transfer of American Technology to the Soviet Union, 1917–1941.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 3 (1981): 421–48.

Ball, Alan M. *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

Baron, Samuel H. *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Bauer, Raymond and Alex Inkeles. *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Bauer, Raymond, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn. *How the Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956.

Benzin, M. A. and T. M. Dimoni. “Krest'ianstvo i vlast' v Rossii v kontse 1930-kh–1950-e gody,” 155–67. In *Mentalitet i agrarnoe razvitie Rossii (XIX–XX vv.): Materialy mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii; 14–15 iiunia 1995 g*. Edited by V. P. Danilov and L. V. Milov. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1996.

Berry, Wendell. *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2009.

———. *Citizenship Papers: Essays*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2004.

Bittner, Stephen. *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008.

Bonnell, Victoria E. “The Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art of the 1930s.” *American Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (1993): 55–82.

Breslauer, George W. *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002

———. *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics*. Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1982.

Brumberg, Abraham, ed. *Russia under Khrushchev: An Anthology from* Problems of Communism. New York: Praeger, 1962.

Buckley, Mary. *Mobilizing Soviet Peasants: Heroines and Heroes of Stalin’s Fields*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006.

Carlson, Peter. *K Blows Top: A Cold War Comic Interlude Starring Nikita Khrushchev, America’s Most Unlikely Tourist*. New York: Public Affairs, 2009.

Castillo, Greg. *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Chumachenko, Tatiana A. *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*. Translated and edited by Edward E. Roslof. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002.

Coclanis, Peter A. "Food Chains: The Burdens of the (Re)Past." *Agricultural History* 72, no. 4 (1998): 661–74.

Cohen, Stephen F. "The Friends and Foes of Change: Reformism and Conservatism in the Soviet Union." *Slavic Review* 38, no. 2 (1979): 187–202.

Cooper, Brian. "Russian *Kukuruza* and Cognates: A Possible New Etymology." *Slavonica* 4, no. 1 (1997): 46–64.

Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991.

Crowley, David and Susan E. Reid, eds. *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*. New York: Berg, 2000.

Crosby, Alfred. *The Columbian Exchange: The Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, 30th anniversary edition. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003.

Cullather, Nick. *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Dalrymple, Dana G. "The American Tractor Comes to Soviet Agriculture: The Transfer of a Technology." *Technology and Culture* 5, no. 2 (1964): 191–214.

David-Fox, Michael. *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Dobson, Miriam. *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009.

Dronin, Nikolai M. and Edward G. Bellinger. *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia 1900–1990: The Interaction of Climate and Agricultural Policy and Their Effect on Food Problems*. New York: Central European University Press, 2005.

Edele, Mark. "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, no. 2 (2007): 349–73.

———. "Veterans and the Village: The Impact of Red Army Demobilization on Soviet Urbanization, 1945—1955." *Russian History* 36 (2009): 159–82.

Engelstein, Laura. "Culture, Culture Everywhere: Interpretations of Modern Russia, across the 1991 Divide." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 2 (2001): 363–93.

Engerman, David C. "The Second World's Third World." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 1 (2011): 183–211.

Engerman, David C., Nils Gilman, and Mark H. Haefele, eds. *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.

Field, Deborah. *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007.

Filtzer, Donald A. *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization: The Consolidation of the Modern System of Soviet Production Relations, 1953–1964*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Fitzgerald, Deborah. *The Business of Breeding: Hybrid Corn in Illinois, 1890–1940*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990.

———. "Eating and Remembering." *Agricultural History* 79, no. 4 (2005): 392–408.

———. *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

———. "Politics as Practice: Thoughts on the New Political History." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 1 (2004): 27–54.

———. "Postwar Soviet Society: The 'Return to Normalcy', 1945–1953," 129–156. In *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union*, edited by Susan J. Linz. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985.

———. *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Fürst, Juliane, ed. *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 29. New York: Routledge, 2006.

———. *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Ganson, Nicholas. *The Soviet Famine of 1946–47 in Global and Historical Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Geist, Edward M. "Cooking Bolshevik: Anastas Mikoian and the Making of the *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*." *The Russian Review* 71, no. 1 (2012): 2–20.

Goldman, Wendy Z. *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin: The Social Dynamics of Repression*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Gorlizki, Yoram. "Anti-Ministerialism and the USSR Ministry of Justice, 1953–56: A Study in Organizational Decline." *Europe–Asia Studies* 48, no. 8 (1996): 1279–1318.

———. "Party Revivalism and the Death of Stalin." *Slavic Review* 54, no. 1 (1995): 1–22.

———. "Too Much Trust: Regional Party Leaders and Local Political Networks under Brezhnev." *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 676–700.

Gorlizki, Yoram and Oleg Khlevniuk. *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945–1953*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Graham, Loren. *The Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Gronow, Jukka. *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin's Russia*. New York: Berg, 2003.

Grybkauskas, Saulius. "The Role of the Second Party Secretary in the 'Election' of the First: The Political Mechanism for the Appointment of the Head of Soviet Lithuania in 1974." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, no. 2 (2013): 343–66.

Haber, Maya. "Socialist Realist Science: Constructing Knowledge about Rural Life in the Soviet Union, 1943–1958." PhD Diss., University of California–Los Angeles, 2013.

Hager, Thomas. *The Alchemy of Air: A Jewish Genius, a Doomed Tycoon, and the Scientific Discovery that Fed the World but Fueled the Rise of Hitler*. New York: Harmony Books, 2008.

Hahn, Werner G. *The Politics of Soviet Agriculture, 1960–1970*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.

Heller, Chaia. *Food, Farms, and Solidarity: French Farmers Challenge Industrial Agriculture and Genetically Modified Crops*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.

Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Hixson, Walter L. *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Hoffman, David L. *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917–1941*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.

Holquist, Peter. *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

———. "A Tocquevillean 'Archival Revolution': Archival Change in the *Longue Durée*." *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51 (2003): 77–83.

Hornsby, Robert. *Protest, Reform, and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Hough, Jerry F. *How the Soviet Union is Governed*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.

———. *The Soviet Prefects: The Local Party Organs in Industrial Decision-Making*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Humphrey, Caroline. *Marx Went Away – But Karl Stayed Behind*. Updated edition of *Karl Marx Collective Farm: Economy, Society, and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1998.

Ilič, Melanie and Jeremy Smith, eds. *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 57. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Jasny, Naum. *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*. Glasgow: Outram, 1965.

Jones, Jeffrey W. *Everyday Life and the "Reconstruction" of Soviet Russia during and after the Great Patriotic War, 1943–1948*. The Allan K. Wildman Group Historical Series 3. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2008.

Jones, Polly. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 23. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Josephson, Paul R. *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth? Technological Utopianism under Socialism, 1917–1989*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Josephson, Paul R., Nikolai Dronin, Ruben Mnatsakanian, Aleh Cherp, Dmitry Efremenko, and Vladislav Larin. *An Environmental History of Russia*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Kassof, Allen. *The Soviet Youth Program: Regimentation and Rebellion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.

Kingsbury, Noël. *Hybrid: The History and Science of Plant Breeding*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Khalid, Adeeb. "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective." *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006): 231–51.

Kharkhordin, Oleg. *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Khlevniuk, O. V. "Regional'naia vlast' v SSSR v 1954–kontse 1950-kh godov: Ustoichivost' I konflikty." *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 3 (2007): 31–49.

Khrushchev, Sergei N., William Taubman, and Abbott Gleason, eds. *Khrushchev*. Translated by David Gehrenbeck, Eileen Kane, and Alla Bashenko. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

Kojevnikov, Alexei B. *Stalin's Great Science: The Times and Adventures of Soviet Physicists*. River Edge, NJ: Imperial College Press, 2004.

Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

———. "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and Interwar Conjuncture." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 1 (2001): 111–64.

Kozlov, Denis and Eleonory Gilburd, eds. *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*. Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

Kozlov, Vladimir. *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*. Translated and edited by Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002.

Lebina, N. B. and A. N. Chistikov. *Obyvatel' i reformy: Kartiny povsednevnoi zhizni gorozhan v gody NEPa i khrushchevskogo desiatiletiia*. St. Petersburg: "Dmitrii Bulanin," 2003.

Ledeneva, Alena V. *Russia's Economy of Favors:* Blat*, Networking, and Informal Exchange*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Lee, Harold. *Roswell Garst: A Biography*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1984.

Lévesque, Jean. "Part-Time Peasants": Labour Discipline, Collective Farm Life, and the Fate of Soviet Socialized Agriculture after the Second World War, 1945–1953." PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2003.

Lewin, Moshe. *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

———. *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Linden, Carl A. *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership, 1957–1964*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966.

Litvin, Valentin. *The Soviet Agro-Industrial Complex: Structure and Performance*. Falls Church, VA: Delphic Associates, 1985.

Magnúsdóttir, Rósa. "Keeping Up Appearances: How the Soviet State Failed to Control Popular Attitudes Toward the United States of America, 1945–1959." PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006.

Martin, Terry D. *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.

Mazov, Sergey. *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956–1964*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010.

McCann, James. *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500–2000*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

McCauley, Martin. *Gorbachev*. New York: Longman, 1998.

———. *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture: The Virgin Land Programme, 1953–1964*. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976.

Medvedev, Roy A. and Zhores A. Medvedev. *Khrushchev: The Years in Power*. Translated by Andrew R. Durkin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975.

Medvedev, Zhores A. *The Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko*. Edited by Lucy G. Lawrence, translated by I. Michael Learner. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.

Melillo, Edward D. "The First Green Revolution: Debt Peonage and the Making of the Nitrogen Fertilizer Trade, 1840–1930." *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2010): 1028–60.

Mincyte, Diana. "Everyday Environmentalism: The Practice, Politics, and Nature of Subsidiary Farming in Stalin's Lithuania." *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (2009): 31–49.

Mintz, Sidney W. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking, 1985.

Mokhov, V. P. *Regional'naia politicheskaia elita Rossii, 1945–1991 gody*. Perm': Permskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2003.

Nikonov, A. A. *Spiral' mnogovekovoi dramy: Agraraia nauka i politika Rossii (XVIII–XX vv.)*. Moscow: Entsiklopediia rossiiskikh dereven', 1995.

Nordlander, David. "Khrushchev's Image in the Light of Glasnost and Perestroika." *The Russian Review* 52, no. 2 (1993): 248–64.

Perkins, John H. *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution: Wheat, Genes, and the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Péteri, György. "Introduction: The Oblique Coordinate Systems of Modern Identity." In *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, edited by György Péteri, 1–12. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.

———. "Nylon Curtain: Transnational and Transsystemic Tendencies in the Cultural Life of State-Socialist Russia and East-Central Europe." *Slavonica* 10, no. 2 (2004): 113–23.

Ploss, Sidney I. *Conflict and Decision-Making in Soviet Russia: A Case Study of Agricultural Policy, 1953–1963*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965.

Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Pollock, Ethan. "From *Partiinost'* to *Nauchnost'* and Not Quite Back Again: Revisiting the Lessons of the Lysenko Affair." *Slavic Review* 68, no. 1 (2009): 95–115.

———. *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Rajagopalan, Sudha. *Indian Films in Soviet Cinemas: The Culture of Movie-Going after Stalin*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

Raleigh, Donald J. *Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1922*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.

———. "Introduction." In *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917–1953*, edited by Donald J. Raleigh. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001.

———. *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Rees, E. A. "Introduction." In *Centre-Local Relations in the Stalinist State, 1928-1941*, edited by E. A. Rees, 1–8. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Reid, Susan E. "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev." *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002): 211–52.

———. "The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution." *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 289–316.

———. “Who Will Beat Whom? Soviet Popular Reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 4 (2008): 855–904.

Ries, Nancy. “Potato Ontology: Surviving Postsocialism in Russia.” *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2009): 181–212.

Roth-Ey, Kristin. *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Rusinov, I. V. “Agrarnaia politika KPSS v 50-e–pervoi polovine 60-kh godov: Opyt i uroki.” *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, no. 9 (1988): 35–49.

Sazanova, L. V. *Istoriia rasprostraneniia kukuruzy v nashe strane*. Minsk: Urozhai, 1964.

Schmid, Sonja D. “Celebrating Tomorrow Today: The Peaceful Atom on Display in the Soviet Union.” *Social Studies of Science* 36, no. 3 (2006): 331–65.

Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.

———. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.

Sharma, Shri Ram. *India–USSR Relations, 1947–1971: Part I; From Ambivalence to Steadfastness*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 1999.

Siegelbaum, Lewis. *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Slezkine, Yuri. “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.” *Slavic Review* 53, op. 3 (1994): 414–52.

Smith, Alison K. *Recipes for Russia: Food and Nationhood under the Tsars*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008.

Smith, Jenny Leigh. “The Soviet Farm Complex: Industrial Agriculture in a Socialist Context, 1945–1965.” PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006.

Smith, Jeremy and Melanie Ilič, eds. *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953–1964*. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 73. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Stites, Richard. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Suny, Ronald G. *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.

Suny, Ronald G. and Terry D. Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Sushkov, A. V. *Prezidium TsK KPSS v 1957–1964 gg.: Lichnost' i vlast'*. Ekaterinburg: Ural'skii tsentr akademicheskogo obsluzhivaniia, 2009.

Taylor, Richard. “Singing on the Steppes for Stalin: Ivan Pyr'ev and the Kolkhoz Musical in Soviet Cinema.” *Slavic Review* 58, no. 1 (1999): 143–59.

Taubman, William. *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2003.

Tininis, Vytautas. *Sniečkus: 33 metai valdžioje: Antano Sniečkus biografinė apybraiža*. Vilnius: Antrasis papildytas pataisytas leidimas, 2000.

Tumarkin, Nina. *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Verbitskaia, O. M. *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo: Ot Stalin k Khrushchevu: Sredina 40-kh–nachalo 60–kh godov*. Moscow: “Nauka,” 1992.

Verdery, Katherine. *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Vail', Petr and Aleksandr Genis. *60-e: Mir sovetskogo cheloveka*. Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1988.

Viola, Lynne. *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

———. *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Volin, Lazar. “Khrushchev’s Economic Neo-Stalinism.” *American Slavic and East European Review* 14, no. 4 (1955): 445–64.

Ward, Christopher J. *Brezhnev’s Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.

Warman, Arturo. *Corn and Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance*. Translated by Nancy L. Westrate. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Weiner, Amir. “Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution: The Life Cycle of the Soviet Revolution, 1945–1968.” *Slavonic and East European Review* 86, no. 2 (2008): 208–31.

Weiner, Douglas R. *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation, and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

West, Sally. *I Shop in Moscow: Advertising and the Creation of Consumer Culture in Late Tsarist Russia*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011.

Wolfe, Thomas C. *Governing Soviet Journalism: The Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

Yurchak, Alexei. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Zelenin, I. E. *Agrarnaia politika N. S. Khrushcheva i sel'skoe khoziaistvo*. Moscow: Institut istorii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, 2001.

Zima, V. F. *Golod v SSSR 1946–1947 godov: Proiskhozhdenie i posledstviia*. Moscow: Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, Institut rossiiskoi istorii, 1996.

Zubok, Vladislav M. *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Zubkova, Elena Iu. *Pribaltika i Kreml', 1940–1953 gg*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008.

———. *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957*. Translated and edited by High Ragsdale. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000.