

**TITLE: SYCHEVKA, SMOLENSK OBLAST' 1776-1921:
A LESSON FOR OUR TIME**

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NCSEER NOTE

This report consists of the summaries of Chapters II, and III of a monograph on the Great Purges using Sychevka, Smolensk oblast' as a case study. The book, presently titled "Milkmaids, Mangers and Terror: The Origins of the Sychevka Show Trial of October 13-18, 1937." is under early preparation with no publication date.

The summaries, written in October 1995, are designed briefly to review the history of the raion, and to project its consequences for the Duma elections of December 1995, and Presidential elections of June 1996, in both cases anticipating substantially heavier communist votes.

Both Chapters in full are available from the Council upon request by mail or telephone (202) 387-0168.

Chapter II, Russian History in the Long Run: Pre-Revolutionary Sychevka, 1776-1914, is about 75 pages, plus 30 pages of statistical tables.

Chapter III, The Establishment of Communist Rule: Sychevka in Revolution and Civil War, 1917-1921, is about 60 pages.

I. RUSSIAN HISTORY IN THE LONG RUN: PRE-REVOLUTIONARY SYCHEVKA, 1776-1914

Roberta T. Manning

The fall of Communism has prompted historians to take a new look at Russia's past in an effort to place the Soviet experience in the context of Russian history. This essay is part of an effort to trace Russian history over the course of what the French call the *longue durée*, in light of the developments of the last two centuries. It focuses on a single administrative district (uezd), from the local reforms of Catherine the Great, which incorporated this region as an administrative unit in 1776, until the present day. The region selected is Sychevka uezd (Smolensk oblast), an agricultural district, inhabited almost exclusively by Great Russians, located midway between Smolensk and Moscow. By tracing developments in Sychevka over a long time period, we can discern more clearly the forces and factors that determine the course of Russian history. In the process, we might better comprehend present developments and anticipate the future. The paper presented here covers the period from the reign of Catherine the Great to the onset of World War I, but it is accompanied by an appendix of statistical tables that trace developments over a larger time framework, often from the end of the eighteenth century to the present day.

Throughout much of its history, Sychevka has stood at the cutting edge of Russian economic development, fueled to a significant degree by population pressure that stimulated initiative and entrepreneurship on the part of the people here but also contributed to the revolutionary crises of 1905-07 and 1917. From the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, Sychevka was one of the more densely populated districts of Great Russia. Today, however, Sychevka is the most sparsely populated district in Smolensk oblast, as successive generations of Sychevkans have left the countryside to provide the human capital for Russia's Industrial Revolution. The move from field to factory began earlier in Sychevka than most other places. Otkhodnichestvo, the practice of peasants going away from their native villages to work, developed here on a significant scale as early as the 18th century, with Sychevka peasants already showing a distinct preference for working in industry. By the early twentieth century 35% of the male population of all ages, including most adult males, were otkhodniki.

Forest land in the uezd was steadily cut back in order to provide more land for cultivation, making Sychevka the least forested area of the Smolensk region. Commercial agriculture developed early among gentry and peasants alike. In the eighteenth century, local serfowners took advantage of Sychevka's location on the Dnieper River network, the main

internal water route to the new Russian capital of St. Petersburg, to produce grain, mainly oats, for sale in St. Petersburg. The short growing season and infertile soil made it more profitable for local farmers from the 18th century on to purchase rye and wheat from the more fertile, temperate South, a further stimulus to local enterprise. Sychevka peasants, serfs included, earned income wherever they could to purchase imported food products. Some participated in the river trade by constructing barges capable of transporting 8,000 puds of grain (288,000 pounds) annually to St. Petersburg. Others found jobs as stevedores in the neighboring port of Gzhatsk, whose wharves extended into Sychevka; they served as sailors on the sailing ships and barges that plied the Dnieper River network or else used river transportation to supplement their agricultural earnings by seeking seasonal work in carting, shipbuilding, construction and industry as far away as distant St. Petersburg. Such extra-agricultural earnings allowed the Sychevka area to support a larger population than it otherwise was capable of doing, given the infertile soil and short growing season of the non Black Soil zone to the north of Moscow.

Sychevka's key location on the main internal supply route to the capital attracted to this area a disproportionate share of Russia's aristocracy, the more influential and wealthy noble families, who acquired large landed estates here thanks to the generosity and favor of Russia's rulers, particularly Empress Elizabeth and Catherine II. Economic enterprise on the part of Sychevka's nobility and peasants ran at counter purposes to each other throughout the pre-revolutionary period. Local serfowners at the turn of the 19th century moved to curb the economic independence and enterprise of the peasant population. In moves reminiscent of the Soviets, fines were imposed upon the commercial activities of peasants; and serfs who persistently engaged in such activities were drafted into the army for life. Peasant tradesmen, who accumulated enough wealth to acquire merchant status, were forcibly resettled in town. Serfowners increasingly transferred their peasants from obrok (quick rent) to barshchina (labor service), stifling peasant economic enterprise and autonomy in an effort to produce more grain products on their own demesnes for the market, while obrok and barshchina payments were steadily raised to support a more luxurious noble lifestyle. Peasants resisted these efforts with repeated rebellions between 1762 and 1830 that gained the Sychevka area the reputation of being the most rebellious district in Smolensk province, if not in all of West-Central Russia.

The years 1808-1830 proved some of the most difficult in all of Sychevka's history, as a result of Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 and the 1811-1817 eruption of the Tomboro Volcano in distant Indonesia. Although Napoleon's main invasion force passed by Sychevka en route to Moscow, the uezd was plagued by looters and stragglers from the Grande Armee during the French disorderly retreat from Russia. A local, largely peasant-based guerrilla

movement rose up to defend the uezd from remnants of Napoleon's forces, led by some of the most renowned Russian partisans of this epoch. At the onset of hostilities, Sychevka, swept away by patriotism, loyally turned over its food reserves to the Russian Army, which remained in the Smolensk vicinity for several years after the war, billeted in peasant homes and living off the land at a time when local harvests were shorter than usual. Indeed, the crops failed repeatedly in Sychevka in 1814-17, as a consequence of the Tomboro Volcano, the second largest volcanic explosion in history, which ejected record quantities of volcanic debris into the atmosphere, blocking the sun rays enough to lower temperatures throughout much of Europe, including northwest Russia, where Sychevka is located. The result was widespread, repeated crop failures that in turn gave rise to escalating grain prices throughout Europe. Sychevka's enterprising, commercially-minded serfowners responded by stepping up grain exports, despite shortfalls in local harvests, a combination that proved all too lethal for many of Sychevka's peasants. The male serf population declined by 11.4% in Sychevka between 1808 and 1830, twice as much as in the other Smolensk uezdy, a demographic disaster exceeded only by the impact of World War II, when, according to the most recent estimates, 22.4% of the pre-war population of the Sychevka district perished.

The Sychevka nobility managed to hold on to more of its land at Emancipation, and received more compensation for land turned over to the former serfs, than was generally true elsewhere in the non-Black Soil region of Russia, notwithstanding the density of the local peasant population. Post-Emancipation Sychevka was consequently characterized by larger than average gentry landholdings and smaller than average peasant allotments. Yet local peasants were required to pay for these lands most dearly, in the form of higher redemption payments than anywhere else in the Smolensk region. The injustice of the Emancipation settlement continued to rankle among Sychevka peasants, fueling agrarian rebellions in 1905-07 and 1917, and contributing to tensions between state farms, created out of model gentry estates, and the local peasantry that persisted well into the Soviet period and played a significant role in the Great Purges of 1936-38 in Sychevka.

Emancipation, however, promoted economic entrepreneurship among both the Sychevka gentry and peasantry. Noble landowners took advantage of the fact that they had retained most of the meadow and pastures lands at Emancipation to specialize in commercial livestock production. Enterprising estate owners imported purebred livestock from Germany and Sweden in the 1870s and 1880s. They raised purebred cattle to sell to other enterprising landowners and engaged in dairy farming to provide milk to the growing metropolis of Moscow. Several Sychevka estates even won gold and silver medals for cheese making at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900. Local peasants responded to continued population growth and the

need for cash income to rent the meadow and pasture lands they lacked, and to pay their taxes and redemption payments, by turning increasingly to otkhodnichestvo and commercial flax growing. At the end of the 19th century, most adult male peasants in Sychevka were regularly leaving home to find work in factories; and 55% of the spring crop land in Sychevka was planted in flax, a moisture loving crop always grown to some degree in this region since the climate favored it. By 1911, flax occupied 76% of spring crop land, rising as high as 96% in some localities. By then, Sychevka and adjoining districts of Viaz'ma, along with neighboring Zytsov and Rzhev uezdy in Tver province, planted more of their land area in flax than any other place on earth.¹ Most of the flax grown was exported. Representatives of British and French flax marketing companies came to reside permanently in the town of Sychevka to facilitate this trade.

Dependency on international trade, commercial agriculture, and non-agricultural work linked the population of Sychevka to distant markets, and created a specialized, non-self-sufficient agriculture incapable of feeding the local population in times of crisis. As a result, Sychevka proved particularly vulnerable to perturbations in distant markets, the impact of events in other parts of the globe, and developments capable of disrupting trade, like wars and business cycles. In the opening years of the twentieth century, a down-turn in the business cycle reduced both the demand for industrial labor and the price of flax on international markets, undermining the delicate balance of the peasant economy of land-short, over-populated Sychevka. With cash income from both otkhodnichestvo and flax growing reduced, and with ever larger numbers of otkhodnik back in the uezd draining, rather than contributing to local resources, the uezd experienced hard times that terminated in major peasant rebellions in the 1905-07 period. The onset of the disorders was set off by the October General Strike which closed down many factories, leaving many otkhodniki without wages and no recourse but to return home to their native villages to wait out the duration of the strike. The otkhodniki brought with them the political culture of Russia's turbulent cities and endowed the peasant movement with leadership experienced in urban political struggles. As a result, peasant unrest in Sychevka did not take the form of the destruction of estates as it did elsewhere in Russia. Instead rent and wage strikes, mass meetings, rallies in railroad stations, support for peasant Duma deputies, and demonstrations in the uezd capital were the main form of peasant unrest in Sychevka during the Revolution of 1905-1907. In 1917, the peasant movement in the uezd would manifest itself in an even more organized manner, utilizing the local elected volost land committees established by the Provisional Government to turn over most gentry land in the

¹By then, more flax was grown in Sychevka than was dictated by good crop rotation practices.

uezd to the peasants for cultivation several months before the Communist Revolution in Petrograd.

What then, were the factors that determined the history of Sychevka over the long haul? The experience of Sychevka would indicate that demography, location, climate and war far outweigh the impact of purely political developments. However, the personal caprice of individual rulers occasionally made an enduring impression on this region, particularly Empress Elizabeth, who reconstructed the town of Sychevka as a miniature St. Petersburg on the Vazusa River to provide herself with an attractive stopping off point in her travels about Russia, Catherine II, who chose Sychevka as one of her new uezd capitals and gave the locality its present name, and Joseph Stalin, whose policies greatly weakened Sychevka's once dynamic agricultural economy even before World War II devastated it.

Throughout the last two centuries Sychevka has stood in the forefront of Russian political and economic development. All major historical events seem to have been experienced first or more intensely here. This was even true of Brezhnevian stagnation. As the outflow of the local population accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s, the Sychevka area lost its economic vitality, resulting in a sharp and steady drop-off in agricultural production in this now predominantly dairy farming area from about 1970 on. By 1979, the local livestock exhibition of some renown, which had existed since pre-revolutionary times, was permanently canceled since steadily declining milk yields rendered this event an embarrassment. Perestroika and the fall of Communism only seem to have made things worse. By 1989, average milk yields in the uezd had slipped back to the levels of the early sixties and the local economy has since continued to decline along with local living standards. The curtailing and then cancellation of grain fodder imports and agricultural credit under Gorbachev and Yeltsin has reduced local livestock herds even more than collectivization did earlier and has deprived local farms of credit at the very time considerable new investment and technology is obviously required to compensate for loss of human labor power due to out-migration and the aging of the remainder of the population.²

As a result, this year's yields in Sychevka, like the rest of Russia, are worse than any in the last thirty years.³ No wonder the local population cast their votes for the Communists and the Agrarians in the December 1993 elections and is expected to do so once again in the forthcoming December 1995 Duma elections! The last bad harvest of this magnitude removed Nikita Khrushchev from political power. This one is likely to put an end to the political career

²One third of the remaining population of Sychevka today are pensioners.

³For the magnitude of this year's harvest failure, which has yet to be reported in the American press, see The Financial Times of London, October 5, 1995 p. 29.

of Boris Yeltsin, since, judging from past experiences, both food prices and shortages will peak at the time of the June 1996 Presidential elections and up to 30-50% of the population is unemployed in some regions.⁴ Perhaps it is high time that American political commentators and specialists on Russian politics stop focusing on the atypical big city population of Russia and take a look at smaller cities and places like Sychevka, where a good third or more of the Russian population continues to live. Perhaps Russia's current woes will only be remedied when the situation in Sychevka is set right. Certainly this is what Sychevka's more than 200 year old tradition of being in the vanguard of Russian history leads us to believe.

⁴Ibid., Oct. 3, 1995 p. 2.

II. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNIST RULE: SYCHEVKA IN REVOLUTION AND CIVIL WAR (A LESSON FOR OUR TIME)

Today a casual observer or chance visitor to Sychevka raion (Smolensk oblast) might erroneously conclude that this region, inhabited almost exclusively by Great Russians, has been passed over by much of recent history. Only a few vestiges of Russia's Industrial Revolution can be discerned here. Several small agricultural processing plants and an antiquated electrode mill, constructed in 1957, spurt out occasional billows of smoke into the otherwise pristine atmosphere. The area is dominated by gargantuan dairy farms, reminiscent of the gentry latifundia of earlier days, many of which still bear the names of the ancient noble estates that they replaced and did so even before the current Russian mania for renamings. The flat, often sparsely grazed clover pastures of Sychevka are not as carefully tended as they used to be, since the farms lack the long and short term credit to purchase sufficient supplies of fuel and fertilizers and to maintain existing equipment properly.⁵

It is tempting to dismiss Sychevka as yet another of the backward, benighted, hopelessly conservative rural backwaters that stubbornly oppose Boris Yeltsin's efforts to bring Russia and its economy into line with the rest of the world. The population in Sychevka, a third of whom are pensioners, have staunchly resisted efforts to make them abandon collective farming. They have responded to Yeltsin's agrarian reforms by converting local state farms into cooperatives, which continue with very few exceptions to farm their land in common. Recently the oblast government in Smolensk abandoned efforts to promote individual farming in light of local resistance and the inability of private farmers to survive, given the dearth of available credit. Instead provincial authorities hired the Danish Ministry of Agriculture to teach local farmers how market-oriented cooperatives function.

The advent of political democracy in Russia has scarcely altered voting patterns in Sychevka. The electorate continues to cast its ballots almost exclusively for the reconstituted Communist Party or its political offshoot and ally, the Agrarians. Supporters of the various democratic parties scarcely can be found here. It is regions like Sychevka that render the

⁵To make matters worse, Sychevka's farms quite often in the course of the last several years have not been paid for their produce, which the farmers have no choice but to turn over to the government anyway, since no storage facilities exist locally (and no funds have been made available to construct them). Under similar conditions, American and French farmers would destroy their products in hopes of driving up prices or altering government policies, but Sychevka's (and Russia's) long history of food shortages, famines, and obedience to the dictates of the center precludes such behavior on the part of local farmers.

Communists, four years after "the fall of Communism" in Russia, the front-runners in the December elections to the State Duma.

While Sychevka seems politically conservative in the context of Russian politics of the 1990s, its past is anything but conservative and may well cast considerable light on the continued allegiance here to some sort of refurbished Communism of the kind that exists today in the Smolensk region. Local academic political analysts, like Evgenii Kodin, the Assistant Rector of the Smolensk State Teachers College, who teaches a seminar on the history of political parties in Russia, refer to the contemporary Communist Party and its offshoots, the Agrarians and the Women of Russia Parties, as "neo-Communists," to distinguish them from the old guard pre-reform Communist Party. Kodin maintains that these neo- Communist parties--or at least their local branches in Smolensk--genuinely favor a market economy, civil liberties and a democratic form of government, albeit a parliamentary, "European style" government rather than the "American style" presidential form favored by Boris Yeltsin. He points out that the outlawing of the Communist Party and dismantling of its central apparatus in the wake of the August 1991 coup d'etat shifted the center of political gravity within the Communist Party after its resurrection to the local party organizations, which differ from one another significantly. He insists that these local differences should be noted and studied by Americans who wish to understand the course of future events in Russia. Kodin also points out that the results of the 1993 elections in the Smolensk region were virtually identical to the results of the free elections to the Constituent Assembly held there in 1917, if one considers the Agrarians as the revival of the pre-revolutionary SRs, which Kodin does.⁶ Whether other localities in Russia also vote along the same lines that they did in the elections to the Constituent Assembly would be interesting to explore. It will also be interesting to see if this pattern holds in future elections.

In any case, areas like Sychevka, with its long tradition of peasant rebellions and industrial otkhodnichestvo, dating back to the eighteenth century, contributed more than its share to the radicalism of the Russian Revolution and the ensuing reconstruction of the Russian economy along lines that differed drastically from the rest of the world economy. Two native sons of this region, A. A. Andreev and N. V. Krylenko, both former otkhodniki, who left the uezd to work in industry and joined the Bolshevik Party, occupied high positions in the Soviet government of Joseph Stalin. Andreev served on Stalin's Politburo from 1930-1952 as the

⁶Kodin comes to this conclusion by comparing the SR political program with that of the contemporary Agrarians. Evgenii Kodin, by the way, was nominated by the Agrarian Party as a candidate for the Smolensk City Council in the 1994 local elections, a honor which he had to decline since he was in the United States on the exchange program for provincial scholars operated by the American Council of Teachers of Russian.

Politburo's leading expert on agriculture, and he seems to have played an influential, albeit as yet unstudied role in the collectivization of agriculture, as first a kraikom secretary in the Northern Caucasus and then as a politburo member. Krylenko served the soviets in a variety of important official positions in the 1920s and 1930s and occupied the post of People's Commissar of Justice in 1937, at the height of the Great Purges, before he himself succumbed to Stalin's Terror.

Although no separate Communist Party organization existed in Sychevka until the end of 1917, the foundations of the future command economy were laid in Sychevka by the local **pre-soviet** government, the Sychevka Committee of Public Safety, composed mainly of Mensheviks, Kadets and all sorts of SRs. Growing food shortages that developed in the course of the First World War escalated sharply at the end of the summer of 1917, when short harvests nationwide and war-induced bottlenecks in the transportation system, cut off food imports entirely to Sychevka, a region which long specialized in flax growing and dairy farming and had not been self sufficient in grain products since the end of the eighteenth century. A series of increasingly violent riots on the part of ever more desperate peasants, who flooded into the town of Sychevka demanding government food aid, prompted the local Committee of Public Safety to establish a state grain monopoly on September 11, 1917, two months before the Communist seizure of power in Petrograd. The committee proceeded to give in to popular demands and moved to establish price controls on "all items of prime necessity," including manufactured goods, leather, wool, kerosene, soap, salt, tar, tobacco, sugar, candy, iron, fuel, construction materials and farming implements. "Speculation" was to be curbed to prevent such necessities from being priced out of the range of the local population. Such price controls were only fully lifted in Russia seventy-five years later, at the onset of 1992, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the fall of Communism.

The larger gentry estates in Sychevka uezd were for all practical purposes expropriated and turned over to the peasants before the Bolsheviks issued their famous land decree sanctioning such practices. The local elected, peasant-dominated land committees of Provisional Government took advantage of a legal provision that allowed the committees to take over any under-utilized and unutilized land and ensure their cultivation and turned virtually all gentry lands in the uezd over to peasants to farm. Only the gigantic Dugino estate of Prince Meshcherskii, which was being protected by an armed force of Cossacks hired at the Prince's expense, remained under the landowner's control until Soviet power was declared in Sychevka. One of the first acts of the new government was to arrest Meshcherskii and his young wife and confiscate their estate.

Not surprisingly, given the extent of local radicalism, there was considerable initial support for the October Revolution in Sychevka. Even without a local party organization of any significance, the Bolsheviks received 75% of the ballots cast here in the free elections to the Constituent Assembly (compared to 55% in Smolensk province and 25% nationwide). Local Smolensk area historians regard the heavy Bolshevik vote in Sychevka in the elections to the Constituent Assembly as more of a referendum in favor of the October Revolution and the Bolshevik platform of "bread, land, and peace" than any indication of the strength of or support for local Communists, and with good cause.

Soviet power of a nominal sort was established in Sychevka on November 8-16, shortly after the October Revolution in Petrograd by a uezd congress of peasant deputies consisting predominantly of Left SRs. Earlier efforts to emulate Petrograd and establish a purely Bolshevik government encountered substantial local resistance, prompting local Bolsheviks to back down quickly, as they were not yet prepared to rule autocratically as they would do later. Local organs of the Provisional Government, however, remained in place in Sychevka and continued to perform vital functions for another four to five months after soviet power was proclaimed. A token Bolshevik, a former highly regarded local otkhodnik, exiled to his native village in 1915 for political activities in the Moscow factories, was chosen to head the new soviet government in Sychevka, possibly as a gesture of good will towards the new Bolshevik government in Petrograd. But the SRs long continued to exert dominant influence in the Soviet plenum. Only after the Left SRs broke with the national Soviet government over the Peace of Brest Litovsk and launched a campaign of political terrorism against Soviet officials, coming close to assassinating Lenin, did the local Bolsheviks, prodded by the Center, move to take local government fully under their control in May-July 1918.

Crucial to the establishment of outright Communist control in Sychevka in the summer of 1918 was the support of the local garrison, which appears to be the only segment of local society that backed the Bolsheviks in their political showdown with the SRs. Local food supplies continued to dwindle in the months following the October Revolution, and peasant support for the Bolsheviks consequently sharply declined. The Bolshevik-concluded Brest Litovsk Peace proved to be a critical factor in the garrison's support of the Bolsheviks. The SRs opposed the Treaty, which put an end to the hostilities with Germany at the expense of relinquishing a quarter of Soviet-held territory. Many SRs wanted to resume the war, something the Sychevka garrison wanted no part of. Only the dispatch of military forces from Smolensk by the oblast Party organization, however, managed to save the day for the Bolsheviks in Sychevka during the so-called SR coup d'etat of May 1918, since SR-led militias

(druzhinas) of armed peasants flooded into the uezd capital to defend the short-lived SR-dominated soviet government in quantities that far outnumbered the local garrison.

With the onset of the Civil War, support for the Bolsheviks continued to waver. The government imposed heavy food procurements on traditionally food importing Sychevka to feed the new Red Army. Three quarters of the land confiscated from the local gentry passed into the hands of state farms (sovkhozy), which were attached to various government institutions in Moscow in order to provide government personnel with food products in this time of acute shortages. The movement of the military front to the Smolensk area in early 1919 resulted in the replacement of the soviet government in Sychevka by "a revolutionary committee," subordinated to the Moscow defense sector. Soviet democracy consequently suffered, and the Bolsheviks were thereby able to gain absolute majorities in the local soviets for the first time in October 1919. Yet Sychevka was not plagued after May 1918 by any further significant anti-Bolshevik rebellions, like those that occurred in a number of neighboring Smolensk uezdy. To be sure, resentment of procurements, sovkhozy, and the abandonment of soviet democracy existed. The local peasant population, when polled towards the end of the Civil War, saw only one difference between the Soviet government and its tsarist predecessor: under tsardom there was only one "boss" and now there was "a multitude (mnogostvo) of different commissars." The peasant population of traditionally land short, over populated Sychevka, however, preferred soviet power with all its many shortcomings to any political alternative that might result in the return of the land to the much hated gentry so long as the outcome of the Civil War hung in the balance. When the tide of war turned sharply in favor of the soviets, soviet control was re-established over more and more of the traditional food-exporting regions. Sychevka's traditional dependency on food supplies imported from these regions would insure the uezd's continued loyalty to the central soviet government which now controlled these supplies.

How do the events described above explain current voting patterns in Sychevka? They show how deeply rooted in Russian political culture are non-market solutions to economic adversity, since key pillars of the Communist economy were already in place in Sychevka before the October Revolution brought the Communists to political power. This account of the 1917 Revolution and Civil War in Sychevka demonstrates how economic hardship alters political developments. Food shortages, growing out of the First World War and the severance of Sychevka's flax trade with foreign nations, created hardships for the people of Sychevka that repeatedly undermined their support for the existing government in power, whether the monarchy, the Provincial Government or the Communists. It is not surprising then that Sychevka voted against Boris Yeltsin's Russia's Choice Party in the 1993 elections, given

slumping local living standards, repeated government failure to pay peasants for their crops, and cutbacks in local livestock herds more severe than any experienced under Joseph Stalin, forced upon local farms by government financial and economic policies that left them unable to purchase the necessary fodder. No one should be surprised when the anti-Yeltsin forces win an even larger victory in Sychevka and elsewhere in the December 1995 and June 1996 elections. This year's harvest in Russia is the worst in thirty years.⁷

⁷The Financial Times of London Oct. 5, 1995 p. 29. Wheat, corn, soybean, and fodder crops all perished by June 1, 1995, in the main grain producing areas of Russia (the Volga, Northern Caucasus and the West), due to lack of funds to purchase fertilizers and maintain vital irrigation systems, which will have a major impact on food supply and livestock production. Yeltsin's current "stabilization of the Russian economy" has been achieved by total neglect of the interests of agriculture. There is no way the country can escape major grain imports, which will undermine efforts to stop inflation, halt the collapse of the ruble and avoid increasing the foreign debt. The June 1996 Presidential elections have been scheduled at precisely the time that food prices and shortages should peak, on the eve of the new harvest. Whoever is in power cannot possibly resist increased credit and aid for agriculture. Russia's history demonstrates that if next year's crops also fail, which could very well happen unless policies towards agriculture are altered immediately, Russia could experience actual famine, the first peacetime famine since the notorious 1932 Famine under Joseph Stalin.