Perestroika of Soviet Agriculture: The Peasant View

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Executive Summary

This report consists of a discussion of current peasant sentiment and activity based largely on the Soviet periodical press, covering the period from approximately mid-1989 until the present. By means of detailed summary and extensive quotations, it explores the reaction of the Russian peasants, collectively and individually, to the prospect of the establishment of private farming and to the various proposals with regard to the form which it should take.

Many Soviet observers, and peasants themselves, say that five years of perestroika have brought the countryside very little. Both formal and informal surveys show that most peasants would prefer use of the land to outright ownership, because they fear another wave of dekulakization in the near future. They see little indication that the regime will support new directions in the countryside with technology, training, new construction, and an increase in goods and services - all urgently needed. Millions of elderly rural residents live in poverty, and only a reversal of out-migration of younger rural people will address the problem.

Peasants are organizing, both politically and on a socio-cultural level, and some peasants, mostly the younger ones with some degree of agricultural training or experience, are demonstrating willingness to do for themselves locally what the central government either cannot or will not do. The question of who is willing to assume the risks inherent in private agriculture and who is not is a crucial one in analyzing the present situation, and some of the answers to this question are given.
A marked change in attitude toward religiously-oriented groups has brought the fate of the Dukhobors back into the news. A group of Dukhobors who had lived for almost 150 years in Georgia (the Caucasus) have taken up residence in Chern Raion, Tula Oblast, as part of a state-sponsored effort to revitalize dying villages.

The countryside has so far benefitted less from perestroika than any other sector, largely because the measures of perestroika are being administered through the Communist Party apparatus. There is a rural "loyal opposition," as well as people who say that the CPSU does not represent the peasantry and is inherently hostile to it. The author thinks there will be a mix of forms of property, including successful kolkhozy and sovkhozy, which will compete with private farming.

The current state of the Russian peasantry will require an extensive and at the same time sharply targeted program to correct it. Some of the materials for setting up this program are already on hand, but its full implementation would require the active cooperation of Soviet and Western scholars and journalists. In the present situation, the prospects for successful implementation must be considered problematical. The author sees no evidence that Mikhail S. Gorbachev is personally responsible for the failure to solve such long-standing problems as those she discusses. A younger historian, David A.J. Macey, has suggested that it may take more than 100 years to achieve "the individualization of peasant agriculture" with a gradualist approach which, given the cultural and historical background of the problem, probably "holds the greatest potential for long-term economic and political success." If we ask, does Russia have the luxury, the answer could be another question, does anyone have a better solution? If Russia has learned anything from Stalinism the
answer to the first question may be, perhaps not, and to the second question, the author answers, not yet.
Peasant Demands

It seems clear that today Communists of peasant origin are, to say the least, ambivalent about the Communist Party's record on policy toward the peasantry. Daniel Thorniley (1988: 11) asserts that "prior to 1917 there appear to have been only four Bolshevik party village cells." No wonder, then, that Western scholars devote so much attention to the organizational aspects of Soviet power in the countryside, for, no matter how it was done and at what cost, the fact that the Bolsheviks established control in the countryside and maintain it to this day through people who are critical but who still call themselves Communists as well as through people who insist on maintaining the old order, has to be considered the political coup of the century.

It also seems clear that whatever the successes of perestroika have been on a cultural-political or ideological level, by and large, the peasantry has benefitted least. The much-discussed Shatalin Plan barely mentions agriculture (Izvestiia 4/IX/90: 3). A combination of a government plan and the Shatalin program is still hampered by the bureaucracy which is left in place (Sel'skaia zhizn' 23/IX/90:2).

During the First Congress of People's Deputies in 1989, 417 deputies published an appeal to the Congress, in which the group, which might be called a "farm bloc," asserted that four years after the beginning of perestroika, a peasant continued to live worse than an urban resident. They blamed "agencies, which have for many years ruined the village with their 'administration,' and even tore away brides from rural bridegrooms, destroying the craft industries and small enterprises which gave work to women." Reproaching city dwellers, the agrarian deputies asked: "Why do the consumers of agricultural produce think
that the village should put up with this [meaning the much poorer living standards for rural residents]?

Noting that there has been a decrease in capital investment, connected with low state procurement prices, the agrarian delegates called for a sharp decrease in large industrial construction, defense, and space exploration, as well as an end to further development of large cities. They wanted to see the money spent instead on rural areas, including more goods for sale. They wanted forgiveness of debt, because the village cannot pay the debt, and the renters will not take it on. They wanted improved technology, and more building materials. They said that the plan penalizes those who achieve the plan and could exceed it. They called for a mutual contract instead of a plan. The land of bankrupt farms should be given to local Soviets for distribution to renters and people in co-ops and sovkhozy and kolkhozy and to families to farm. They want to do away with incompetent farm management, and, invoking the Leninist principle "don't dare to command the peasant," they want to do away with any interference from above. They envisaged all kinds of farms, declaring that the competition would be a good thing. "We demand fundamental land reform (a law on the land) and real pluralism of forms of property and economic management."

They wanted a Committee on Agrarian Questions made up of People's Deputies of the USSR, in order to separate defense of the interest of the peasantry from the bureaucrats. This committee would be subordinate only to the Supreme Soviet, and no decisions touching agriculture and the peasantry could be taken without its approval. They want to give the work of the peasant prestige, which they think it has in all developed countries, and they called upon the state change its attitude toward the peasantry as a class (Sel'skaia zhizn'
Some of these demands surfaced again during the sessions of the Agrarian Section of the 28th Congress of the Communist Party in June 1990, attended by one sixth of the delegates (750 delegates plus 93 invited observers). Sel'skaia zhizn' reporters listed a number of proposals including:

- a two to three year program for renewal of the countryside;
- the right of all citizens to use [emphasis mine] of the land;
- mechanisms of price control, with parity of prices of agricultural and industrial goods, with a permanent commission to oversee the process;
- making the countryside a priority in fact and not only in word, transforming the agro-industrial complexes, including giving building materials and other technology to farms and other organizations requesting it;
- implementing a state program for the food supply in the transitional period leading to a market economy, using a new price mechanism, a system of incentive taxation, financing, credit and other market incentives;
- speeding measures to prepare anti-monopoly legislation;
- recreating the Ministry of Agriculture, Agricultural Supply, and the Ministry of Rural Construction;
- working out a program for a fund for emergency situations;
- "with the aid of the defense industry, technically equip the peasantry and food providers to the teeth." (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 6/VII/90: 2)

As the year progressed, however, it became increasingly clear, as one deputy put it that "they aren’t listening very much in the government and the higher organs of Soviet power." (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 14/IX/90: 2) In December 1990 an agrarian-bloc deputy meeting with Gorbachev at the Fourth Congress of People’s Deputies blamed inelastic procurement
policies for problems with the grain supply and told him that the deputy's own farm in Dnepropetrovsk Oblast had exceeded the plan and could have given more. "But we need wood, bricks, slate, trucks, and not promises. We no longer believe them." Another deputy, recalling that the old fear of force no longer existed, noted that nothing else had taken its place. He called upon the leadership "either to give us the necessary resources for production or simply force us to give up the grain." "At which," the reporter wrote, "the President noted with an ironic smile, 'The second choice is easier.'" (Sel'skaia zhizn' 20/XII/90: 1)

Why, indeed, is force easier? Many Soviet commentators, like Literaturnaia gazeta's Kapitolina Kozhevnikova, blame the bureaucrats, asserting: "We need to break the stubbornness of those who are brought up to take away, not allow, dekulakize, and revise. For really, we can no longer live that way." (Literaturnaia gazeta 18/IX/90: 11)

Peasants Organize

Collectivization in the USSR is currently being described as at best a failure and at worst a "war on the peasantry" -- a war which by many indications is still going on. The Communist Party and the "command-administrative" attitude of its bureaucrats are being blamed for all of the problems the peasantry currently has. When coal-miners and other industrial workers were striking, a peasant wrote to a newspaper asserting that farmers weren't striking, but loyally attending to the business of feeding the country. Recently, however, as rural people express their dissatisfaction with the pace of change, peasant organizations have been formed, some of them calling themselves "associations," such as "Agroprommassotsiatsiia," which seems to be a
union of managers (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 19/XII/89: 2), and an association for village renewal, whose
president is a Lenin Prize laureate Ivan Vasil’ev, and whose appeal does seem to be directed
toward the rural intelligentsia (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 27/XII/90: 3).

An association with more clearly defined goals, called simply "Farmer," has been formed
in Volgograd Oblast (Izvestiia 29/XII/90: 1), where of the 126 presently existing private farms
only 20 have been operating more than a year. In letters to officials in the government of the
RSFSR who are concerned with agriculture, "Farmer" suggests that its members be supplied
with materials and equipment directly through the RSFSR Ministry of Agriculture and that they
get their fuel and lubricants from oil-producing regions. The association also suggests setting
up special service stations for the repair of agricultural machinery, so that not so much is
scrapped. The association is ready to do this in Volgograd Oblast, which they calculate would
reduce by a third the present equipment deficit on private farms there. The chairman of the
oblast Soviet, V. Makharadze, supports the association’s initiative, adding that the Soviet has
decided to alienate a million hectares of kolkhoz and sovkhoz land and give it to individual
farmers through local agencies. In this situation, the association will assure healthy competition.

On June 1, 1990, the First Congress of Renters and Entrepreneurs, headed by P. G.
Bunich (a Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences) was held. It represents
6,500,000 persons in agriculture, industry, consumer services, trade, construction, science and
culture (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 2/VI/90: 2). The Union of Agrarian Workers of Russia, representing
14,000,000 workers in agro-industrial enterprises, held their founding congress on April 26-27
1990, and its head is V.A. Starodubtsev (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 28/IV/90: 1-2), who is also the head
of the Peasant Union of the USSR, which claims to represent 40,000,000 persons. No sooner
had the organization started, however, than an initiative group within it declared that the Peasant Union was "not the voice of the people but the ambition of the agricultural bureaucracy" (Izvestiia 19/X/90: 1).

Starodubtsev, in an interview with Sel’skaia zhizn’(4/VI/90: 2) turned aside the suggestion that he was an apologist for the kolkhoz-sovkhoz system, saying that all forms of land holding were necessary, and that "without a peasant socio-political organization, we will not survive.... I think that the CPSU should look at the needs of the countryside in a new way and give political priority to it.... If we judge from the draft platform of the CPSU for the 28th Congress, where the peasant question is given only a few lines, it becomes clear that changes in the direction of recognition of processes taking place in the countryside have not occurred. But we are still hoping for a renewal of the CPSU. Therefore at this stage, we create a Union of Agrarian Workers. But if these measures do not help the peasant to achieve social justice, the union can become a peasant party."

Vladimir Bashmachnikov (Literaturnaia gazeta 6/II/91: 5), the president of AKKOR (Association of Peasant Farms and Agricultural Cooperatives of Russia) claims that there are now 3500 peasant farms, almost 4,000 interfamilial agricultural cooperatives and voluntary artels about 50,000 persons working at their own risk. Even though he prefers the word "farmer" to "peasant," and says that the people do, too, he asserts that the peasants are for private ownership and against the appearance of any new latifundia or landlords. "The Stalinist model must recede into the past." Bashmachnikov declares that it is precisely his members who can "halt the tragic process of degradation and neglect of the land." As proof of this he cites Pytalovo Raion, Pskov Oblast, which now has more than 80 family farms; they produce 2.2
times more per hectare than the kolkhozy and sovkhozy. (Other reports from Pytalovo Raion, however, indicate that the strongest new force, after initial resistance, is renters, the majority of whom are young, with agricultural training.) (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 1/XI/89: 2) Bashmachnikov thinks that by the end of the century, the "private sector," including urban gardeners and orchard-growers and people working on their household plots, will produce about 20% of all food. The Council of Ministers of the RSFSR has set aside a billion rubles for the needs of farmers, as well as the first of thousands of tractors and automobiles. A notice of the second congress of AKKOR (Izvestiia 1/II/91: 1) also indicates considerable governmental support for the emerging peasant movement, which, to judge by an appeal signed by V.A. Starodubtsev and others deploring decreases in capital construction and other investments in agriculture (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 25/I/91: 1), may not be entirely justified. One of the hottest debates at AKKOR’s second congress centered around the necessity of having a Peasant Bank, and there was considerable dissatisfaction among the delegates about a proposal to set aside half a billion rubles to found such a bank and to put the other half in insurance. "If we put this billion in a bank, nothing will come of it," protested one delegate, to applause. "We need the money now. Me, for example, I need it this instant! We are breaking up and the country is flying with cosmic speed toward famine. We mustn’t let a chance slip." In the end, AKKOR’s presidium was instructed to put most of the sum in a bank to be used for credit, and to parcel out the remainder to AKKOR’s regional organizations to be used for credit, including interest-free credit, as the peasants saw fit (Izvestiia 6/II/91: 2).
History, Ideology, Dogma

It is, apparently, one thing to know that, and another to set a sensible course. A law professor, G. Bystrov, notes that the Land Code as of August 1990 had no clear program for giving the land to the peasant, but on the contrary preserved the rights of the kolkhozy and sovkhozy. He likened this to the policies around the time of the Stolypin reforms, when the tsar said the rights of the obshchina (commune) were to be preserved, but individual peasants were to be helped to leave it. Bystrov stresses that the fate of the peasantry depends on resolving the problem of who is the owner of the land. He describes the Bolshevik position on the land about the time of the Revolution as being one which advanced the idea of nationalization, transferring ownership to the state. At the time Russian Marxists were saying that land ownership was superfluous and even dangerous from the point of view of capitalist means of production.

Therefore the Bolsheviks viewed the nationalization of land as a measure which was bourgeois democratic in content, but at the same time a progressive step leading to socialism.

The agrarian program of the Mensheviks, on the other hand, rejected the nationalization of land. The main thing here was to give peasant lands to the peasants, and the landlord’s land to the keeping of municipalities with subsequent rent to the peasants. The ideologist of municipalization, G. V. Plekhanov, in a dispute with Lenin, warned that nationalization would inevitably give rise to centralization and bureaucratization. Today we know who was right in this dispute, and it is time to admit this honestly, and not pray to a utopian project of the last century on the subject of nationalization of land (a project, to put things as they are, implemented only in the USSR and Mongolia) and even more so, not to build on an unviable idea new utopian projects for implementing land reform under conditions of transfer to a market economy.

The agrarian program of the Social Revolutionaries is embodied in the 242 peasant demands contained in Lenin’s Decree "On The Land." Bystrov says that the essence of the SR position “consisted in the annihilation of state property in the land, freeing the land from the fetters of private property, and the transfer of it to the just and equal use of those who
themselves work and live by their labor." At the time it was expected that the peasant would give up his taste for private ownership and go further.

I would like at the same time to direct attention to the fact that nationalization in the Leninist understanding meant transfer into the hands of the entire public not only the ownership of the land, but the land itself. In this connection Lenin particularly emphasized that socialists never proposed such stupidity as alienating the land from the peasants against their will.

Subsequently all this was perverted by Stalin and his policy of forced collectivization, which declared that the state had exclusive right to ownership of the land. This policy led to the alienation of the peasant from the land, economic disintegration and spiritual impoverishment of the countryside. Precisely from this time, the policy of the Party and the state in relation to the peasantry was shot through with hypocrisy and lies.

Bystrov says it is time to stop using these arguments as a reason not to give the land to the peasant and undertake radical transformation in this area. He thinks that there is a way out, but he says that the Peasant Union of the USSR and the Union of Agrarian Workers of Russia organizations which in his opinion have been formed in a manner violating the needs of democracy are opponents of a radical solution. They essentially do not want to see the farmers threaten the position of the sovkhozy and kolkhozy, because they see the movement for private farming as a departure from socialism.

He says that what has been going on, until the end of the 1970s, was a war against the peasantry, since it was the peasantry which preserved capitalism and practiced it, "constantly, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale." (This is apparently a quote from Lenin too well known to his Soviet readers to need documentation). He thinks that the problem can be solved by a special State Committee of the USSR on Land Reform, subordinate only to the President of the USSR. This Committee could undertake an inventory of the land, determine
the mechanism for taking away the land and creating a fund for distribution, as well as organizing the problems of land tenure for peasant farms and cooperatives. Such committees could also be set up in Union Republics, and in the localities. (Izvestiia 26/VIII/90: 2)

G. Lisichkin, a People's Deputy of the USSR, and a Doctor of Economic Sciences, declares that there is a struggle for the purity of socialism through slogans, and he lists the dogmas which have the USSR in an ideological bind at present. The first is the non-commodity character of the socialist economy, which led to what Lisichkin calls a "political famine." During the period 1986-1988, 2.9 million head of cattle were lost, 7.5 million pigs, and more than 10 million goats and sheep. He also blames irrational investments, like the irrigation projects of the past, and also the way in which industry ignored certain needs of the countryside. The negative attitude that Soviet society has toward agriculture has been building up over the years because of the shoddy products of labor. "The hardest work is not that which is hard, but that which is senseless." He appears to be disputing the view held by some people that agriculture can be renovated by some other means than a market economy. In spite of 70 years of trying, there are still people in the upper echelons of power who have these anti-commodity illusions.

The second dogma is faith that success in the development in agriculture is determined primarily by the right choices of the forms of property. Thus, there was collectivization, followed by "sovkhoozization," followed by turning the kolkhozy into state enterprises. Lisichkin cites the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belorussia, who, addressing the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, stated that industrial workers in his republic receive in the form of wages 37-40% of the value of what they produce,
and most of the rest is taken away in the form of taxes, state prices, and insurance and bank interest. Lisichkin asks what kind of property it is which will take so much that the worker often does not have enough to live on from day to day. The level of exploitation, he says, is two-and-a-half times that which prevails in the West. He points to a number of kolkhozy and sovkhozy that work, in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, or the kibbutzim in Israel. "Unpaid labor cannot be productive, no matter what forms of property it is wrapped in." He likens the payment for labor to that under the landlord system. He points to India as an example of a country which early on rejected collectivization and opted instead for a "green revolution." He thinks that this kind of experience could be adapted to Soviet conditions, were it not for the fact that most people are still hung up on the idea of "no one's" property.

The third dogma is the idea that an enterprise's right to exist does not depend on its level of profitability. There are an enormous number of farms that get less than 10 tsentners per hectare, and it takes more than a ton of fuel to work this land, and in addition, two tsentners of seed, plus all the iron and steel that go into the agricultural technology. Some people think that the way out is to let people buy for their farms the things they need with the money they have earned, and this in itself will raise the productivity of labor. According to him the weak farms would only get weaker, and the strong farms would have to carry them. He recalls the decision at the 28th Party Congress to forgive debt in the sum of 70 billion rubles. This was a forced measure, inasmuch as there was no money to be gotten from these farms, but: "It is sad to see grown people who are being fed by the state who are so genuinely glad that the coffin in which the Soviet ruble is finally being buried, is being carried out of our common home, and with it, hope for improvement in our life in the near future." A third of the farms are producing almost
two thirds of all the produce. Wouldn't it, he asks, be better to orient them to state procurement and let the others find whatever would keep them alive, including tourism? "In other words, you have to do away with the practice by which the horse doesn't get the fodder."

The fourth dogma is that success in the countryside depends only on the peasant. You need to untangle the peasant from the state apparatus, but that is only going to work if industry begins to produce for the countryside. Bystrov thinks that only a firm convertible ruble will help this situation.

The fifth dogma concerns the dual nature of the peasant, according to which the worker peasant is okay, but the peasant property owner is an enemy of socialism, and is subject to extermination. This attitude exists to the present day, Bystrov says, and can be seen in the Law on Land, which does not mention private property, lest, God forbid, the bloody instincts of a property owner be awakened. The peasant factually cannot freely purchase machinery, seed, or pedigree cattle. He is still at the mercy of the kolkhoz and sovkhoz administrators, and even fellow villagers envious of his success. (Izvestia 31/VIII/90: 3)

From Kolkhoz Chairman to Family Farmer

One of the bitterest indictments of the kolkhoz system I have read in more than thirty years of reading Soviet newspapers began pleasantly enough, with a photo story in Izvestia (2/V/90: 1, 3) about Leonid Petrovich Peshekhonov, a kolkhoz chairman who, with his wife, two sons and daughter-in-law, rented 530 hectares of plowland from Rodina Kolkhoz, Trosna Raion, Orel Oblast, and with a 300,000 ruble loan from the bank, successfully planted and
harvested grasses. The secret of his success in the fact that his whole family are agricultural specialists. Initially made him the object of envy; his "Koster" cooperative was the first family cooperative in Russia, and having survived three years, he has been joined by Viktor Iuzhko and his family from Uzbekistan and Anatolii Arkhipov from Yalta, bringing the cooperative to a total of ten persons (presumably excluding what looks to be a fair number of small children). In the spring of 1990, the Peshekhonovs were planning or had already started to lay an asphalt road from the cooperative's production unit to the raion center, an animal-husbandry building, and a network of shops in Orel and Trosna for marketing farm produce.

In July 1990, A. Pushkar', Izvestiia's best reporter, interviewed Peshekhonov, who told him that after study in a tekhnikum and two agricultural institutes, he was sent by the raion committee at age 26 to work as kolkhoz chairman for 16 years. He had cow barns, a school with a sports complex [a relatively rare thing in rural areas], and houses built, but he disliked his role of enforcer, and questioned the right of the raion Party secretary and the head of the raion agro-industrial organization not only to tell him what to do but when to do it (both men were trained as teachers). He characterizes the Brezhnev period as one in which "the demoralization of Party and management relations spread like rust," and chairmen were drawn into "illegal and semi-legal manipulations with treats for influential people, presents and tribute for functionaries." Peshekhonov's son Nikolai wanted to become a kolkhoz chairman, but Peshekhonov said that if he did, he would kill him.

Peshekhonov was pasturing cows with his wife when his sons came to suggest to them that they take advantage of the new law on cooperatives. The raion Party Secretary would have none of it, but Peshekhonov was supported at the oblast level by the leadership, including E.
Stroev, who at the time of the interview with Peshekhonov was a secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Peshekhonov wanted land for indefinite use, but the kolkhoz refused, and the family had to settle for renting 536 hectares for a seven-year term. The kolkhoz pays nothing for land and no one, either at the raion or oblast level, knows what land costs. The kolkhoz declared that its net income per hectare was 100 rubles, and it demanded 1,000 from renters, saying that grasses were highly profitable, and 10,000 rubles would be realized. An agreement was reached for 700 rubles rent, but before the crops had even been harvested, the kolkhoz brought suit against the Peshekhonovs for 465,000 rubles. The kolkhoz won and 42,000 rubles were taken from the Peshekhonovs in legal fees. The Peshekhonovs appealed to the oblast court.

Peshekhonov complains that he pays income tax (kolkhozniks are exempt), taxes on profits, on his farm buildings and on his machines and personnel, since he is considered to be the chairman of the cooperative; never mind that he is also the tractor-driver, the machinist, and the carpenter. Finance agents want the 300 rubles. The kolkhoz did indeed give him land, but in ten different places, so that he has to make a seven kilometer detour to get to it (the kolkhoz equipment-operators travel 15 kilometers, wasting a lot of fuel while protecting "the sacred principles of primacy of public forms" of landholding). The Peshekhonovs and others (he says 12, which contradicts the original story, but may reflect changes over time) took over the dying settlement of Rudovskoe. He is both sad and bitter about the fate of villages like these, two of which he himself, as chairman, had written off. Now there are only the bumpy outlines of the primary school he attended. These things motivated him to quit being a chairman, but no one believed that, having been an administrator for so long, he would sit on a tractor; everyone
thought he would move away, leaving the hired help [betraks] to labor in the fields. On the contrary, he has set up a covered threshing floor, with the help of a 420,000 ruble loan and renovated some machinery from the kolkhoz scrap pile. They have sown wheat, millet, and buckwheat and will sell to anyone, without requiring coupons or passports. "To be a peasant means to trade." It also means that as a member of a cooperative, he works from six in the morning until 11 at night, but at least in winter he is entitled to 24 days vacation (in the kolkhoz, he would get only 15). If a member gets sick or leaves the cooperative, his share is returned to him. Peshekhonov has no shares to show for his work in the kolkhoz. He does, however, have plans to acquire 50 head of cattle and to build houses, and he thinks that in six years his loans will be paid off.

Peshekhonov, prompted by the memory of a young tractor-driver who said he wasn't going to join a cooperative and break his back for 200 rubles a month when, by remaining in the kolkhoz he could drink himself senseless and still get 8,000 rubles at the end of the year, talked about the pervasive drunkenness in the countryside. Wages were introduced in 1966, and vodka became something people could purchase easily, drunkenness supposedly easing a hard life. In his time, on his first kolkhoz, he saw 34 deaths from alcohol, including four women. Theft is also common, the rule being that if the kolkhoznik takes 100 rubles, the kolkhoz chairman takes 1,000. He behaves like a lord of the manor and lets child-care facilities and schools remain unfinished while his own house is raised in a matter of months. Irrational decisions are made: clover is sown but it is used for seed, and the cows are fed rotten silage. The buildings are meant to hold 1,000 cows, but there are actually 1,400, and when they say, on paper, that they get 3,000 liters per cow, it means prizes for everyone.
Peshekhonov sarcastically quotes from the new law a statement about public property integrated with individual family plots and says it pains him to look at his daughter-in-law's mother: she has turned into a splinter with broken hands, milking 30 cows for the kolkhoz and at home working her 50 sotki of land with all her might, all by hand. She has cows, four bullocks, six piglets, and fowl, and does everything with a pitchfork, a shovel and a bucket.

... besides the NEP [Peshekhonov says], whatever was done in the countryside, even what seemed good, did it harm.... [We need] a new Stolypin.... It has become clear that neither the kolkhoz nor the rural Soviet will give the land. This means we have to work out a mechanism for dealing with this, let's say, a bank and the raion Soviet. I often wonder why I should pay the kolkhoz for land which my ancestors cleared and then bought up in 1861, and then received ownership of from the Revolution. No, I'm not against paying taxes on the land, but to the agency that uses them in fact, for constructing roads, schools, hospitals and shops, that is, the raion, oblast, Russian Soviet.

Now about the material and technical guarantee of the peasant's independence. It would be ideal to arrange matters so that the farmer, if his tractor broke down, could call on his transmitter and ask for a repair-person to be sent. Better to pay 100 rubles and sit on a spare tractor. The boss has to save time. It means gold for the state.

They frighten us by saying that there'll be unemployment if we give land to the peasants! We won't know how to employ the bureaucracy. We're conjuring up bogey-men. After all, our country is virgin territory for entrepreneurship.

Peshekhonov asks why there are now so many people in so many peasant organizations and at so many congresses who are really functionaries masquerading in a peasant's coat, and he says that it is a reaction to the new laws about land, property, rent, and the decision to have a multiplicity of economic activities. The system is mimicking accommodation to perestroika, but in fact it wants to alienate the worker in the countryside from the means of production. A congress representing the whole society, from chairman to calf-tender should address itself to the complete rehabilitation of the peasantry. The recently published directives of the leaders of the RKP(b) and VTsIK [Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the All-Union Central Executive Committee] and the orders of the Red punitive expeditions for the annihilation of the peasantry and the Cossacks make your hair stand on end. We
should tell the whole truth about the fact that along with the Civil War, there was a four-year war in the country against the peasantry. The ideologists and organizers of genocide against the peasantry should be named. Whoever they were – the leaders of the world proletariat or the legendary army commanders, Stalin and his bloody clique, or the quiet armchair theoreticians from Khrushchev’s and Brezhnev’s time.

There’d be no harm in speaking at this congress about the role of the Party in the countryside. Do we need rural raikoms and kolhoz-sovkhoz Party Committees? In my view, the party of the dictatorship of the proletariat has no business in the countryside. Because of the utopian nature of the doctrine, the ideological incompatibility with the peasantry as the class of the "petty bourzhui" and the howling incompetence of its leaders in agriculture has brought us to economic crisis, the breakdown of the peasantry and the lumpenization of the countryside.

It seems to me that the main thing should be the question of affirming private ownership of the land as the basic principle of a market economy, working out mechanism for giving land to those who can and want to work on the land. We need land and freedom. Space and freedom for economic activity. Not in order to fill my pockets I have everything and don’t need anything else. And I won’t take the land to the grave with me. But I ought to have my business, and my share, and I will give them to my sons. Only then is life filled with meaning (Izvestiia 5/VII/90: 3).

Peshekhonov continues to attract admiring reporters, one of whom revealed that when he left his post as chairman of the kolkhoz because of conflicts with the bureaucracy, he was offered the position of head of a slipper factory. Now that he has his own operation (still leasing from the kolkhoz), he plows ahead against all difficulties, relying on credits which do not always materialize. Just recently the head of Orelbank approved 170,000 rubles in credit for Peshekhonov’s cooperative, but so far they have not received a kopek of it, because the money was given instead to a new sovkhoz, and so Peshekhonov’s building plans have been halted. In spite of the fact that Peshekhonov has not fulfilled his contract with the kolkhoz, he thinks that only formalities stand between him and the right of hereditary use of the land (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 7/III/91: 2).

Peshekhonov’s experience and views are not unique. An Izvestiia sketch from Kaluga Oblast examines the case of Viktor Anatol’evich Gulov, who in 1989 was the chairman of a
kolkhoz in the Rostov area which had successfully turned into a "cooperative of cooperatives."
Then, because of his son's ill health, Gulov was forced to move, and he, with the kolkhozniks' approval, agreed to head the Zaria Kolkhoz in Medynsk Raion, Orel Oblast (a kolkhoz with a ten million ruble debt, a miserable two-thousand-liter per year milk yield from its cows, and 12 tsentners of grain per hectare). Unfortunately, what had worked in Rostov Oblast, did not work in Kaluga Oblast. Gulov spends much of his time scolding drunks and dealing with the problems they cause. He dreams of becoming a farmer, but he knows that the present system will not give him independence, and so, he tried to change the system within the kolkhoz. His kolkhozniks listened to his plans, approved them and continued to work as before, waiting for instructions from the office. On the other hand, the kolkhozniks are not entirely to blame for the failure of the experiment. First there was bad weather; then, simultaneously, on one of the farms, the milkers reached pension age, and there was no one to milk the cows. Finally, there was the fact that although 100 peasant farms might have been carved out of the kolkhoz land, there were only 40 tractors to give them.

Still, Gulov had an idea, and with the help of Kalugagipromzem, he got a model for a new experiment, in which every peasant could be his own boss, and hire the specialists for what was needed, or the labor of others who did not want independence. Then the talk began of future kulaks and batraks, and Gulov's assertion that under normal farming conditions any hired laborer was better off than any kolkhoznik did nothing to cool passions, which the local press fanned. Nevertheless, the kolkhoz was disbanded, and a union of small farms and enterprises was formed. Gulov himself formed an experimental farm with another man. The new farmers lack almost everything, but they are convinced that this is their last chance to save and restore
As we see, there is at present a great debate about whether the peasant wants land, and if so, in what form. Some people even ask what form of land management is the most appropriate. The USSR-wide Institute for the Study of Public Opinion found that only 15% of the people surveyed wanted to take land for farms. In Belorussia, eight out of ten were in favor of the kolkhoz and sovkhoz system, as were the majority in the RSFSR (Izvestiia 1/VII/90: 2).

Two farm administrators, L.N. Kushnarev and A.L. Kushnarev, father and son, the father director of a sovkhoz near Tver, and the son a kolkhoz chairman, talked to a reporter from Sel’skaia zhizn’ (24/X/90: 2) about the peasant’s readiness to take the land. Both are People’s Deputies of the RSFSR and to the Supreme Soviet, and participate in the work of the Committee on Agrarian affairs. The son is particularly critical of the way farm produce is processed by local factories, with the head of the raion agro-industrial organization behaving like the local tsar:

[I]f he wants to, he gives you the equipment and the fuel, and if he doesn’t, he won’t.... [W]e urgently need a law about self-government. The power of the Soviets today is nominal. The chairman has a stamp and nothing more. It’s our misfortune that the Soviet has been turned into an intermediate link between the kolkhozniks and the chairman of the kolkhoz. You still go for everything to the administration. The social-cultural-and-consumer facilities are there, and health services, too. Wages in the Soviets have doubled, but what has changed?... The way they worked before is how they still work....

The mass media are shouting at the top of their lungs give land to the peasants and tomorrow we’ll eat our fill! I’d like to believe that, but I’m a realist.... This
generation of rural workers is not prepared for independent work on the land. The level of equipment is low, and the agronomic and support services are antediluvian. I've talked about all this with the kolkhozniks, asking their opinion, and I travelled the election district meeting with voters... Only two people wanted to take the land, neither of them in my kolkhoz. In our parts, I think, few people need the land. We'll accept the Law on the Land, but there won't be a mass movement for private farming. Perhaps after a few years the situation will change, but for now, that's how it is....

The elder Kushnarev, who says he favors turning the kolkhozy and sovkhozy into membership cooperatives and joint stock companies respectively, is uneasy about the present campaign, having seen them all, from collectivization to the dissidents:

Certain forces think that the kolkhozy and sovkhozy must be destroyed as being bankrupt. An atmosphere of uncertainty is created: what if they suddenly dissolve the kolkhozy tomorrow? People stop working normally, discipline falls, production decreases. Why this opposition of kolkhoz to farmer? I don't know a single administrator who would block the way of private farming. Are we looking for enemies again?! (Sel’skaia zhizn' 24/X/90: 2)

Mikhail S. Gorbachev, addressing a meeting of cultural workers on December 1, 1990, bases his opinion on the subject of ownership of the land on personal experience and that of his family:

... Take my two grandfathers. One was sentenced for not having fulfilled the plan for sowing in 1933, at a time when half the family died from famine. They sent him to Irkutsk to work at lumbering. And this tortured family remained, half dying out in 1933. And the other grandfather was an organizer of kolkhozy, then the representative of the Ministry of Procurement. That was a personage for those times. He was from a peasant family, a seredniak. They also put him in prison for 14 months and questioned him, demanding that he admit to something that he hadn't done. Well, thank God he remained alive. But he lived in this plague house, in a house of 'an enemy of the people,' and his relatives and friends could not approach him. Otherwise, they would have been sent where he had been. So we [referring to Shevarnadze and himself] had everything, we saw it from the inside, we knew and we know this life, we could and we can compare....

You and we arrived at 1985 feeling that we couldn't live like this. We began to seek an answer to how to live.... We agreed that we wanted genuine socialism, because
for us the socialist idea is not a threat. I, for example, am a convinced socialist and in this sense am deeply devoted to socialism....

Gorbachev was recently asked whether he had stopped believing in socialism, and he replied:

but why should I stop? This is my deep conviction. I will not stop as long as I have the ability to speak and do everything [to promote socialism. The political process] is like nuts and bolts. I know what to do with them. I worked for six years on a combine. Something breaks and you have to fix it.... You don't have to tell me what democracy was before 1985. I'm from the office of the First Secretary of the Kraikom, where I was for almost ten years; he could decide everything not thinking, saying this is the law or the Constitution. He decided and that was it. There should be conscience. But what about those who had no conscience? You know how those people decided things.

Look at this phenomenon. People who have gone through everything and overturned Stalinism and the command mentality are for socialism! Socialism, you see, is in the people....

Yes, we have to say goodbye to the past. It's a tortuous process! But to what or to whom should we bid farewell? Should I renounce my grandfather who was devoted to all of this to the end? In his day he was for seventeen years the chairman of a kolkhoz. I never heard from him that he doubted what he was doing on this land, on the land where he was born and where all the other lived: some came from Voronezh and others from Chernigov. I cannot go against my grandfather. I can't go against my father who stood on the Kursk Salient, at the Dnepr, who was covered in blood and who stormed across. He got to the border and was wounded in Czechoslovakia. Should I, in cleansing myself and renouncing all this command mentality and Stalinism, reject my grandfather and my father, and the things they did? Reject a generation? Or did they live in vain? You and I, as I have said more than once, didn't simply grow up in a bog, we have a strong point of support under us....

I do not accept private property in the land, no matter what you do to me. Rent, even for 100 years, even with the right to sell renters' rights, with inheritance. Yes! But private property with the right to sell the land, I don't accept. This, by the way, is the tradition of the rural commune, our rural commune.

Mozhaev [a public-affairs writer on rural matters] interjects: They stood by that for a thousand years.

Gorbachev asks: By the rural commune?

Mozhaev replies: Yes, the commune arose here earlier than the state.

Gorbachev, to laughter and applause, says: Comrade Mozhaev, I shake your hand. I knew you and I were together on this .... On the other hand ... there's no need to be frightened by private property. We need to fear speculation in land.... (Izvestiia 1/XII/90: 4)

In this respect, Gorbachev seems to speak for many people. O.I. Boikov, a member of
the CPSU since 1956, now retired in the city of Opochka, Pskov Oblast, writes to Sel’skaia zhizn’ (6/II/91: 3): “Privatization (in Russian, the sale or transfer to private ownership) of land - is it really for the good of the people? It isn’t hard to imagine in whose hands in the last analysis the land will be! In the hands of the wheeler-dealers of the shadow economy, and the renter or farmer will be able to obtain land from them at astounding high prices....”

Quite a few Party people feel compelled to fight the idea that capitalism is the answer to the problems of Russian agriculture. The Party Secretary for Kurgan Oblast, E. Salikh, points out that agriculture in Russia was never private. The land belonged to the commune and the commune made the decisions. People understand pretty much that if they opt for individual farming, they would be face to face with their problems of repair, spare parts, and fuel. A different system of purchasing, through a cooperative, would have to deal with collecting milk from a number of small farms. The question still remains: what are the optimal sizes for farms? He quotes one 94-year-old man who has seen it all, and who is of the opinion that only the kolkhoz system gave the peasant breathing room. It is only the perversion of the Leninist agrarian policy that has brought agriculture to this situation.

In order to buy one K-700 tractor, a grain-harvesting combine and a Belarus tractor, you have to sell 370 tons of wheat. If the farmer has 100 hectares planted to grain, it will take him four or five years of normal harvest to get that type of equipment, but where is he going to get the fertilizer, the spare parts, and the fuel, and where is he going to prepare and store his seed, and his chemicals, and live himself? It takes 3,000 rubles to build one stall in a cattle barn, and it takes four years of selling all your milk from the cows and burying the expenses to justify the cost of construction. The cost of one wheel of a K-700 tractor is equal to the cost of one bull.
Scholars have calculated that if you bought 50 hectares of plowland, you would need a one-time investment of 200,000 rubles. Kurgan Oblast has three million hectares of plowland, which, if the plan for turning kolkhozniks into farmers goes forward, would cost 12 billion rubles, without even calculating the other expenses. If the necessary level of investment in agriculture cannot be achieved, consideration will have to be given to better management of the funds that do exist, and priority must be given to developing agriculture. If all the peasants in Kurgan Oblast decided that they wanted to farm, they would be in worse shape than they were during the NEP, when they could only get a horse, because the oblast simply does not have the equipment. Today a horse won’t take you far. The tractor driver working on the K-700 can be a highly qualified machine-operator [with the knowledge of how to repair the machinery], but he only knows how to do some of the necessary operations (plowing, doing some of the steps in preparing the soil, and transporting loads). By no means everyone can calculate how much to sell and when to harvest, when to vary the planting, or engage in animal husbandry in a literate fashion (Sel’skaia zhizn’, 21/XI/90: 2).

The Congress group doing public-opinion surveys gave 470 persons in the agrarian section of the CPSU a questionnaire about their attitudes towards various kinds of landholding. The delegates are considerably more in favor of the kolkhozy and sovkhozy (64% and 47% respectively) than the population as a whole (20% and 13%), but the population is only slightly more optimistic, in absolute terms, about the prospects for private farms (24%) than the delegates (12%). Concerning private ownership of the land, 73% of the delegates were against, 23% were in favor, and the rest had difficulty with the question. Statistics show that eight out of ten persons are having trouble getting food, which the reporters recognize as a potentially
dangerous situation. The majority of the delegates took a negative view of changes in the
agrarian sector over the last two or three years, which is the same opinion held by sovkhoz
workers and kolkhozniks; 77% of those questioned thought that it was necessary to change the
prices of agricultural produce and increase investment. Soviet people still think that the real
reason people are leaving the villages is that they lost the sense of ownership and being masters
of the land. The sociologists say that their survey showed that only one in ten felt himself to
be the master; 27% were skeptical about the benefits currently being extended, and 57%
thought that there should be further development of subsidiary agricultural enterprises attached
to factories. According to present calculations there are only about 21,000 individual farms in
the country, as compared to 41,000 kolkhozy and sovkhozy.

More than half of the delegates surveyed thought that the rural Soviets, the raion and
oblast organs of state power were doing a poor job, but the Party organizations were doing okay.
"At the present time, a positive evaluation (even if this is a self-evaluation) is a great rarity.
However, ... 63% of those surveyed wholly or in some degree support the idea of the formation
of an independent peasant political party. This means that they do not completely rely on the
Party organizations with their previous make-up to realize the interests of the peasantry. This
deserves the most serious reflection." (Izvestia 6/VII/90: 1)

Ogoněk (1990, No. 38, p. 3) published an appeal from the founding conference of the
Peasant Party of Russia dated September 4, 1990, which asserts that the country is on the edge
of famine, and that it is time to stop trying to save the kolkhozy and save the people. The
Peasant Party of Russia is the party

of liquidation of the kolkhoz-sovkhoz monopoly in agriculture, the return of the land to
the peasants, and the complete emancipation of the farmer. We are the party of land
reform, of a multiplicity of forms of land ownership, with priority to private ownership of land and the right of purchases and sale of it. We are for equality of economic conditions for all strata, and honest competition between the state and the private sector, where the judge is the consumer and only the consumer.

We are the party for allowing every peasant to leave the kolkhoz and sovkhoz with a share of land and accumulated production funds, which means the party of transforming the command-administrative agrostructure into a voluntary union of peasant property-owners.

We are the party for burying forced procurement in any of its manifestations. No one is allowed to distribute the fruits of the peasants' labor. Only equal contract relationships are allowed, a free market of industrial goods and agricultural produce without assignment or funding limits!

We are the party of material and spiritual rebirth of the countryside, the party for defense of the peasant home, placing the peasant family at the center of attention, with its needs, concerns, health, well-being, and its equality in society. Free labor on free land is not a goal but a means toward a worthy life for the Russian farmer.

We have a good memory. We remember by whom the Decree on the Land was really written and why October won so easily in a peasant country; we remember the fraudulent misappropriation of the peasant's land into the property of the ruling apparatus; and the people will not forget the genocide of dekulakization and collectivization. Those who are incapable of drawing lessons from experience are doomed to suffer in the future. And at the same time the peasant party is open for cooperation with everyone who wants to achieve parity in relations between industry and the countryside, and who demands the cessation of nationally [ethnically] dangerous donations, and stands for the return to the countryside of what has been stolen, and the healing of the ailing plowland. We declare direct and active support of the course of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR in agrarian reform and will facilitate of the turning of words into deeds, and good laws into bread and money.

In our party there will not be a division into farmer and kolkhoznik, sovkhoz agronomist, and independent peasant, co-op member, and worker at 'Rostsel'mash' [the country's largest agricultural equipment factory]. The plowman and the blacksmith always worked jointly. Our task is to bring agrarian production in Russia to the world level about which the martyrs of the Agrogulag (Vavilov, Chayanov, Tulaikov, and millions of others) dreamed. Our generation of Russian people will still see excess Russian grain on the markets of a rich planet.

We appeal to those who have left the kolkhozy: peasants, first generation city-dwellers, support the Peasant Party in its difficult hour! Join in our ranks, give the aid of sympathy, action and money for the orphaned mother-village! If the people have at present a reconciling, unifying task, it is the restoration of the countryside.

Entering into the political life of the country, the Peasant Party of Russia takes upon itself the burden of responsibility for the future of the people and is prepared through legal means to achieve power. The doors of our party house are open to all. We call you into the Peasant Party of Russia!
For democracy, humanism, and for the rebirth of the Russian countryside! For free labor on free lands!

S. Sharetskii, who besides being the chairman of Red Banner Kolkhoz, Volozha Raion, Minsk Oblast (Belorussia), also holds the degree of Doctor of Economic Sciences, declared in Sel’skaia zhizn’ (8/XII/90: 2) that there was no justification for thinking that the CPSU represented, or could represent, the interest of the peasantry. He proposed the rural Communist Party organizations form the basis of a Peasant Party. This Party should support perestroika and the interests of all strata of the rural population, from agricultural workers to the intelligentsia.

In January 1991, a Peasant Party of Belorussia was founded. During its first congress it issued a declaration stating that it was leaderless on purpose. One of the members of the organizational committee, the economist Mikhail Antonenko, says that the party intends to be parliamentary with a centrist platform. There will be fractions in the republican parliament and local administrations, which supposedly does away with the necessity of "leaders and foot soldiers." (Izvestiia, 9/I/91: 3)

The leader of the Peasant Party of Russia is the more than slightly abrasive writer Yurii Dmitrievich Chernichenko who was recently offered, as a kind of joke, or perhaps as a media stunt, 500 hectares of land, for perpetual use, without compensation, in Sechenov Raion of Nizhegorod Oblast by the chairman of the Krasnoostrovskii Kolkhoz, S.Z. Aisin. This is one of the best kolkhozy in the raion. Its subdivisions are almost completely mechanized, houses are being built, the community center is being restored, and there is even (thanks to the kolkhoz chairman’s persistence) a road from the farm to the raion center. Chernichenko turned up with a Central Television camera crew in tow to accept his gift, but, as a deputy to the Congress of
People's Deputies, he surely knew that the law is that only the local Soviets can give land. Aisin, who has been the kolkhoz chairman for 13 years, having worked his way up from farm laborer, told Sel'skaia zhizn' that he didn't understand why Chernichenko calls the kolkhoz a deflated balloon and the sovkhoz an automobile without a battery! The kolkhozy and sovkhozy still feed the country. Unfortunately, aid to kolkhozniks is only talk. Here's the reality: a KSK-100 combine used to cost 12,000 rubles, and now costs 40,000. In order to buy a ton of fertilizer, you have to sell two tons of wheat. In order to buy a 50,000-ruble combine, you give up about 300 tons of grain. In order to have fuel and lubricants on the farm year round, you need 400 head of cattle with a milk yield of 3,000 liters. And they accuse us of working poorly.... I'm no enemy of farmers. More than once I've proposed to my kolkhozniks that they rent the land. I'm trying to persuade my specialists. People are not yet ready. They prefer to work in the collective economy.

Aisin admits that his telegram to Chernichenko was a joke, but a second telegram to Polozkov, in the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party is not: "We [the members of his kolkhoz] are upset that a Law on the Land was adopted without consulting the people. The land belongs to the people. We demand that a referendum be conducted." (Sel'skaia zhizn' 2/II/91: 2)

There is an almost universal clamor, among Party members and their opponents alike, for increased investment in agriculture, but in an article pointedly titled "You Won't Feed the Country With Illusions," an Izvestiia correspondent reports the calculation of two Soviet economists that in the last 15 years, investment in agriculture rose by a factor of 3.9, and its share in the total investment increased to 20%, or, he says, more than that in metallurgy, machinery-manufacture, and in the chemical-and-lumbering complex combined. The economists blame "the imperfect nature of the relations of production" in the agrarian sector, but the reporter suggests that before putting power in the hands of local Soviets, it would be well to have something other than illusions to work with (Izvestiia 12/XII/90: 1). An Academician of
the USSR Agricultural Academy [VASKhNIL], writing in Sel'skaia zhizn' (8/VII/90: 2-3) claims that over the years agriculture was legally precluded from getting profits, so there were none. He does calculations by which he attempts to prove that agriculture was only slightly less profitable than the rest of the economy as a whole, and he argues that agriculture should be getting 27.7 billion rubles, and not the 19.5 billion that had been allocated. In addition, as the economist Vasilii Uzun points out (Literaturnaia gazeta 15/III/89: 11), 99.8% of the marketable milk produced by kolkhozy and sovkhozy is even today taken out of the countryside to the city, and the same is true of other products, like meat.

I.I. Kukhar', the Chairman of the Union Council of Kolkhozy noted in a speech to the Fourth Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR (Izvestiia 19/XII/90: 6-7) that agricultural consumers failed to get about 20,000 trucks, more than 30,000 tractors and more than 500,000,000 rubles worth of equipment promised in 1990, and although the plan for 1991 projected the same level of investment, there was some doubt that the equipment would actually be delivered. "... [N]ext year the kolkhozy and sovkhozy will have nothing with which to harvest silage crops, and in 1992, grain as well. [In 1990] many millions of hectares of winter crops remained unsewn and more than five million hectares of land were not plowed for spring sowing." Kukhar' calls for a regional approach to the solution of problems of supplying farms with equipment. On the question of rural construction, he says that the intra-kolkhoz construction organizations now "illegally" being operated by Agropromstroii should be returned to the kolkhozy, since they were set up with kolkhoz funds and at present, more than 30% of their work is being done in cities.

In February 1990, the economist Vasilii Uzun, having documented the extent to which
"[T]he city simply robbed the countryside and thanks to that lived well," both in pre-Revolutionary times and after collectivization, declared "a Peasant Party is necessary ... in our country." One of the most important tasks of such a party would be "a fight for the political rehabilitation of the peasantry."

Asserting that the CPSU regularly adopted decisions about the independence of kolkhozy and sovkhozy which were violated before the ink was dry, Uzun writes:

In 1988 a Law on Cooperation in the USSR was adopted, giving the kolkhozy the right to choose the structure of production, to control the product, and to sell it as [the kolkhozy] saw fit, at evolving market prices. But in fact, as before, both the plan and the prices were determined from above. And the guilty ones cannot be found.

Not a single raikom secretary was seriously punished for violating the laws and decrees on the independence of the kolkhozy and sovkhozy. But tens of thousands of agricultural managers and specialists lost their jobs and others were subjected to criminal prosecution violating the instructions and directives of the superordinate authorities.

At this point, Uzun says, it is too much to expect that some bureaucrat is going to look out for the peasants' interests, even in a special Committee for Agrarian Questions under the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, because the Communists are too fond of their state enterprises and deeply hostile to private ones, a stance which has economic consequences: in 1988, the government paid three different prices for a ton of the same quality milk in the RSFSR: 675 rubles to sovkhozy, to kolkhozy 610 rubles, and to the population 325 rubles. Clearly, Uzun thinks, only the formation of a Peasant Party will give the peasant the equality he seeks (Literaturnaia gazeta 21/II/90: 12).

Some Communists seem to agree with Uzun. V.V. Aniskin is, at 41, a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU. He was born near Tula and has two brothers also working in agriculture. For the last decade he has been the chairman of his kolkhoz in Klin Raion of Moscow Oblast, having worked his way up from agronomist in another
village (five years) and brigadier in yet another (also five years). He says that a decent farm with a good house costs 500,000 rubles [V.I. Kashin, a member of the Politburo and Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the RSFSR gives a figure of 300,000 ₽ 500,000 rubles for farms in Belgorod, Moscow, Orel, and other oblasts (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 21/11/90: 3)], a sum hardly within the reach of families with lots of children. Their needs are better served by a kolkhoz system free of petty constraints from above, helped, as he has wanted for a long time to do on his farm, to build factories to process milk and meat, and encouraged, as people on his farm once were, to share bread-baking chores or to give neighbors part of a newly slaughtered pig. He says that in this situation, Kukhar’s Council of Kolkhozy has only a symbolic role and Starodubtsev’s Peasant Union cannot be expected to do much (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 12/IX/90: 3).

A.A. Porutchikov, director of Kirillovskii Sovkhoz in Zemetchinskii Raion, Penza Oblast, addressing the 28th Congress of the CPSU, assured his audience that his rural comrades, Party and non-Party alike, believed the Party capable of dealing with the problems that agriculture presents, but his audience seemed inattentive, inasmuch as they applauded his question “...what is the rural communist’s guilt, and what does he have to repent of and answer for?” without waiting for the answer:

For the fact that from dawn to dusk he doesn’t leave his tractor, swallowing dust by the kilogram and doesn’t live to get a pension? For the fact that he works without pause, without days off, or vacations, working in the sovkhoz and having his own economy, in order to feed himself, his family, and 17 of those who go around with posters heaping all blame on the Party [referring to people he saw during his stint as a delegate to the Congress of the Russian Communist Party]? (Sustained applause)

For the fact that during her 20 years as a milker, be she Communist or non-Party, her fingers don’t uncurl and at night, in her short hours of rest, she moans with pain even in her sleep? ...

Is it reasonable, when there are gas pipelines with six strands in one direction and
three in another, for a rural resident to have to roll up his sleeves and chop not less than 20 cubic meters of wood for the winter? For just one family. (Applause) He does this while he has strength and health, but what are those who physically can't - the pensioners supposed to do? It's painful to look upon old people living out their lives in deserted, empty villages. In places where earlier they had lived, worked, and believed in a better future and bore children, today there is not a single able-bodied person. And there are many such villages.

I say this not because absolutely nothing has been done in our villages, although my native places are the genuine Russian hinterland and one cock crows for four regions [the region is so depopulated]. In recent years our residents have still learned what asphalt roads are, what good houses of culture, kindergartens, consumer services and trade centers are. But this is only the beginning.... I propose the implementation over the next two or three years of the following measures.

First. To bring gas to at least the central settlements of kolkhozy and sovkhozy.
Second. To completely finish the construction of roads with hard cover within farms.
Third. Solve the problem of constructing well-built houses and consumer and cultural facilities.
Fourth. Guarantee the countryside a supply of quality equipment and parts at affordable prices.
Fifth. Guarantee an equivalent and equal exchange between the countryside and industry (Sel'skaia zhizn' 5/VI/90: 3).

Emancipation By Decree

Many of the problems of current attempts at land reform are illustrated by a report from Tula Oblast. The Torkhovo Sovkhoz in Lenin Raion has 4500 hectares of plowland and about 2000 head of cattle. The grain harvest is 15.6 tsentners per hectare, and the daily milk yield per cow is 5.5 liters. [By way of comparison, E.K. Ligachev, at the time a secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, told a Party seminar on current agricultural problems that in 1988 the average milk yield in the public sector was almost 2800 kilograms, compared to 2,171 kilograms for cows in family operations. Almost a quarter of the USSR's total agricultural production is accomplished within family operations (Izvestiia 7/IV/89: 2). Milk yield appears
to be going down, probably for lack of fodder, and because, as Ligachev notes, in some places half of farm households have no cattle at all. The decline in family-owned herds has been going on for some time; see The Station Relay [1986, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 11-14].]

An experienced equipment operator in the Torkhovo Sovkhoz, who has been working for 30 years, says that people would take two or three hectares tomorrow, or they would fatten a dozen bulls, but the problem is that they have nowhere to take the produce; either the receiver is sick or the scales have broken, or some other kind of disaster. There's the loading and unloading and cost of the truck.

So before giving out the land, you have to tell the peasant why this is being done and where he's going to send the product. No one needs land for the sake of land. When you have 40 sotki [4/10 of a hectare] you don't know where to send things ☟ the fruits and vegetables rot, the potatoes you sell to the sovkhoz for a pittance, and the meat you pack for yourself in jars. Earlier you might have taken them to the bazaar, but the mafia is working there now, and they've seized everything there in such a way that you don't want to do any "business."

A younger worker who earlier had worked at the enterprises of atomic industry, had to leave Lithuania, because as he said, "They began to put pressure on the Russians." Before that, apparently, the Russians "pressed," and so he asked that his name not be mentioned in the newspaper. "I would like to take 100-150 hectares of land for personal use immediately if I were still living in Lithuania. But I had to go away... Even though the land is better here, more fertile. I'd keep cows and calves. But for rent! Give me the land - I'm ready to work."

As he was speaking, a woman broke in to have her say. She is 35 years old and is the head of the local communications center and receives wages of pennies. Who if not she should get rich at the expense of the land? She says: "It's shameful to listen to what you say: 'Give
me the land! Have you tried to work in the sovkhoz as you work on your own garden plot? I am categorically against property in the land. Let everyone work in the sovkhoz, but the sovkhoz has to be reconstructed so that there is incentive for working in it. There it is!"

There was a pause in the conversation such that it either had to be ended or raised to a new level. A 38-year-old man, who lives in a one-room sovkhoz apartment, and who is uncertain whether he now is a peasant or a worker says:

I would take the land, I'd work on my own farm, but I'm afraid: they will dekulakize when the people start to get rich. People even today will not admit for anything how much money they have in their savings-books; they're all afraid of something. And as soon as you become a property owner, it will become clear to anyone that a rich person lives here. My grandfather and grandmother were chased into Siberia. I see how they will debate over the renters, and send them in two seconds to Siberia as edinolichniki [farmers who were independent].

The forty-year-old sovkhoz cook asks what she would do with the land. She stands from morning until night at the stove cooking lunches and dinners for the equipment-operators, and her husband carries a rifle in the forests and fields because he's a hunter, a job he chose so that he could work a couple of days and then take a couple of days off to hunt. "If I say to him throw down your rifle and hitch up a plow, you know where he'd send me." Everyone laughs, and a young woman says, "We have to live the way they do in the city: you work your eight hours and then you take off." The sovkhoz economist interrupts and says that she has worked in the city and "I know these cookies and how they act. It's always good where you aren't. No, your own land that's good. I think that the people will now pour out of the cities onto the free lands."

The secretary to the director of the sovkhoz interrupts, saying:

I'll tell you how my sons were hot to be renters. They gave up their work in the city and rushed here. The director says: take a herd of calves and pasture them on the
open range. My kids took them. They drove them from the central settlement 15 kilometers to the summer camp. There's heat and horseflies and the animals are weakened. They began to drop, but we didn't let them perish: we carried water and watered them. The calves were only fattened a little when a runner came with an order: drive the animals back for slaughter. And they drove them! Another 15 kilometers. All the additional weight dropped off on the road. Isn't that an insult? My kids tormented themselves so all summer and in the end didn't get 6,000 rubles. For more than a year they went through the courts. Do you think that those people are right who think that the sovkhoz and the edinolichni will get used to one another? He will set up a bee hive, and the sovkhoz will poison it, because the sovkhoz has a planned spraying of herbicides. The boss will want to sow clover, but the sovkhoz herd will get into it. Do you think that the district manager will be on the side of the private operator?

People are so sure that the laws will revert that they aren't doing anything. More than 3,000 various categories of agricultural workers in Saratov, Ul'ianovsk, Kuibyshev and Voronezh Oblasts were questioned about their attitudes toward the present changes. The director of the Institute for Socioeconomic Problems of the Development of the Agro-Industrial Complex under the Academy of Sciences USSR, V. Ostrovskii, says that not more than 10% of those questioned wanted to leave the sovkhoz or kolkhoz and the majority of them did not want to take more than five hectares of land, and then only in order to expand their subsidiary economy. Of those questioned, 56% did not want their children to become farmers; 32.5% of the kolkhozniks and 34.1% of the sovkhoz workers said that they had no desire to increase the head of cattle in their subsidiary economy, and 17.4% and 12.5% respectively said that there was no one to care for the cattle.

Among those wishing to purchase land, 6.3% were under 35; 3% were 35-45 years of age, and 1.1% were over 45 years old. This suggests that the majority of the peasants are not psychologically ready for the change to small-group and family farming. Seventy percent fear a new dekulakization. The director says:

Personally, I am in general for private farming and land owning, but, as they say, the
truth is more valuable [i.e., it's only an opinion]. Therefore I call upon everyone to consider that the present circumstances don't meet the high demands of private farming. There is an unfavorable demographic situation: the rural population is declining and getting older; the rural family, because it has so many children, cannot become the primary economic unit of the new relationships.

Therefore, while supporting the creation and stimulating the process of private farms, we must not reject or even more, destroy by force, the public economy. The right of choice of the form of economic activity should remain with the peasant."

(Sel'skaia zhizn' 24/1/91: 2)

Yet another sociological survey (in five raions of Kuibyshev, 12 raions of Kursk and eight raions of Vologda Oblasts) revealed that from administrators to milkers, 90% were of the opinion that if farmers appeared among them, they would make up less than one percent of the population, since 79% of those questioned felt that their health did not permit such activity, and one out of ten thought that the proper support was lacking (Sel'skaia zhizn' 17/X/90: 1). On the other hand, as of January 1991, it is now possible for anyone to acquire land on which to build a house in the city of Kursk and potentially in other areas of the oblast as well. Three thousand families will get a small plot (10 sotki), in addition to the 840 plots already given out (Izvestiia 19/I/91: 1). This is part of the exercise by local Soviets of the right to distribute land as they see fit. In Ivanovo Oblast, for example, peasants may receive up to 100 hectares. Here land which is less than 50 meters from a major highway, forest land, or land involving water funds, may not be used privately, or in a manner detrimental to the ecology of the oblast (Izvestiia 31/VIII/90: 1). However, some justification remains for the opinion that the state does not support farmers. In an appeal to the Supreme Soviet and government of the RSFSR, the Council of the Agrarian Union of Russia expressed concern about recent laws passed which undermine the position of kolkhozy and sovkhozy and about decreases in sums for housing and other rural construction, as well as for equipment (Sel'skaia zhizn' 25/I/91: 1).
It seems clear that the reforms in Russia, as they impact on rural areas, were done without sufficient thought. For instance, in the Upper Volga region, teachers are insisting on more pay from the local budget for each school notebook that they check, saying that, after all, they work nights to do this. Prices have really gone through the roof. In Tver Oblast, in rural stores, good quality sausage costs 27 rubles per kilogram, ordinary boiled sausage 15 rubles 60 kopeks, sardines 19 rubles 70 kopeks, veal 16 rubles 20 kopeks per kilogram, and pork 14 rubles 20 kopeks. Transportation is another problem. Bus service was never very reliable in rural areas, and now that the rural routes have been judged unprofitable, they are being shut down. How are people supposed to get to the hospital or to the social security department? Post offices are being closed; small consumer services facilities (which were opened with such difficulty) are now being closed, and medical points as well. For instance, in Zubtsov Raion in Tver Oblast there are 29 medical points. For better or for worse, they did provide services to the peasants. Now that medicine has gone to cost accounting, unprofitable facilities have to be closed. The only solution is to put the medical points in the budget of the kolkhozy and sovkhozy. What about the libraries? Books are getting more expensive, so is wood and coal, and the librarians are asking for raises. In some places libraries are already being closed. And with all their service personnel, why shouldn’t the empty shops be closed in deference to cost accounting? (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 31/I/91: 1)

Even the rural electrification network is in danger. The villages of the Upper Volga were accustomed to having the electricity cut off at all hours of the day and night, but in recent years
the situation had improved to the point where people were beginning to use electricity (in 1989 more than 35,000 kilowatt hours) to heat their homes. Now the Energy Ministry has said that it will no longer fund the construction of 35 kilovolt and higher lines, and a limit has been set for 1991, the suggestion being that the money can come out of local budgets for future years, or from profits that Kalininenergo has received. The trouble is, rural users get energy below cost, and deals with factories are not possible. For lack of resources, the repair of rural electrical stations has been reduced by half. The USSR Minister of Energy and Electrification, E.I. Petraev, admitted that Kalinin Oblast [now Tver Oblast] was not the only region where rural electrification was in trouble. What Gosplan USSR allocated, other organizations did not deliver, or delivered in fractions of what had been requested. Minister Petraev is pinning his hopes on the outcome of negotiations with republican ministries and he says that if the measures worked out in this program are implemented, in two years, the electrical network for agricultural use will be improved (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 8/VIII/90: 2).

However, as Sel’skaia zhizn’ (31/I/91: 1) notes: "The countryside for a long time was divided into two hemispheres. In one there was the production sphere, which gave grain, milk, and meat. In the other there were the peasants themselves, with their poorly organized way of life. It is this second hemisphere which is today on the edge of collapse, and without it, as we know, the first hemisphere that is, the kolkhozy and sovkhozy, the farmers and the renters will not survive."

Sel’skaia zhizn’ (1/II/91: 2) does not hesitate to say that "The promise by the Russian government of priority development of agriculture hangs in the air and remains empty sound." Although procurement prices have been raised, the same decree which brought this about also
raised wholesale prices for industrial goods, building materials, and services. The government also said that it would compensate farms for the increase in prices, but, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture compensated the Riazan Agricultural Industrial Complex to the tune of 5,200,000 rubles for spare parts. However, it turns out that the organization considers, based on today's prices, that the compensation should have been 11,000,000 rubles, and the discrepancy arises because the Ministry, in its calculations, used last year's prices. The question arise whether the organizations can't just go to the bank for credit (this in circumstances in which weak farms have had their debts canceled). Going to the bank is no solution because the cost of credit has doubled in Riazan, and in the oblast could cost 70-75 million rubles a year. The farms cannot afford fertilizer either: the cost of a ton of lime has risen from 3.5 to 13 rubles, which means that the oblast will have to spend not less than an additional 60 million rubles. At present the oblast has a shortfall of a little more than 600 million rubles. This is 1.5 times all the profit of the Agro-Industrial Complex for all of last year. Every seventh enterprise (57) could go bankrupt.

Sel'skaia zhizn' presented these facts to the Minister of Automobile and Agricultural Machinery Manufacture of the USSR, N.A. Pugin, who made sympathetic noises, commenting that one factory which produces tires increased its prices 11 times. The General Director of the large tractor factory Rostsel'mash came to the Minister and complained about the rising cost of materials. The profitability of Rostsel'mash is very low, so they need to raise their prices. The Minister says that they are reviewing the situation case by case. He claims that they still need subsidies: either the firms that make the equipment can be subsidized or those who buy it can be subsidized. The Minister is for the first alternative, but he says what all officials always say:
a dialogue is necessary with all parties concerned.

Trying to Make a Go of It

Kapitolina Kozhevnikova, a reporter for Literaturnaia gazeta, got mail from all over the USSR when she wrote an article about a Dutchman who wanted to hire Soviet people. She was saddened to learn that all the young men wanted to leave their country to study how to be farmers, and stay away from their homeland. Here are three examples:

My biography is the same as many others [writes A.M. Gaidar from Dnepropetrovsk Oblast], school and the army. After the army I didn’t study. How much would an engineer receive? A hundred and fifty rubles. But in the mine, as a tunneler, I get my 400-500 rubles. I worked three years in the mine, and was drawn to the land. And then there was the law about rent. Three of us signed a contract to fatten cattle. We took 320 head. And the kolkhoz immediately began to violate the conditions of the contract. They gave us only several tons of green fodder for the entire summer. The pastures were insufficient. We pastured the cattle wherever we could. Autumn came, and there was no place to put the cattle. They didn’t repair the farm as they had promised. You can’t winter the cattle in the summer pasture. We had to break the contract. I’m not afraid of work, but they don’t let us work....

T. V. Lashkov from Vlosovskii Raion in Leningrad Oblast writes:

Since I’m not needed by anyone in my homeland, is it possible that I would find a common language with the Dutch? I have 20 hectares of plowland and 17 hectares of woodland that’s a peasant economy. I would like to be a real farmer, but there’s no agricultural equipment. I bought a new T-25 tractor for 6,000 rubles. It’s standing idle: they refuse to give me a fuel pump.

Lashkov was by no means the only person suffering from the gas shortage. A renter in the Briansk Oblast village of Brasovo was able to buy a tractor costing 7500 rubles, but he was unable buy gas for it (Izvestiia 15/VI/89: 3). During the same months, Izvestiia (19/VI/89: 1) reported a similar problem in many areas of the Ukraine "Again. We write of this every year,
beginning in the spring." In Lashkov’s case, he has an agreement with the kolkhoz which, intentionally or not, the kolkhoz has not been able to honor.

I wrote to the factory [Lashkov continues], and got no reply. From scrap metal, I made a single-axle trailer, a transverse rake, and a mower, but all these are for that very same tractor that’s standing idle. How am I supposed to work the soil? I myself built a farm for 20 head of cattle, and a chicken coop for 300 broilers, but I couldn’t finish it because I didn’t have slate, glass, and a metal grid. Nothing like that is for sale.

Vladimir Ivanovich Kholin, from the village of Bediarysh in Cheliabinsk Oblast, writes that he is in his third year of peasant farming, without any equipment, but with successes that even he didn’t expect. He and his wife and two daughters raise 30 head of cattle on an absolutely naked spot, in a broken down barn, overcoming all obstacles. He asks:

What could I do if I had the machines and the technology? It’s bitter and shameful to look at the long lines for produce. Our land, our provider, lies cursed and tormented. We have paid dearly for everything. This has been going on for many generations. But the Russian peasant is not quite exterminated. (Literaturnaia gazeta 18/IX/90: 11)

Yana Nikitina, writing in Ogonëk (1990, No. 33, pp. 1-3), tells a story about Aleksandr Bozhko, the grandson of a kulak, which illustrates what is wrong with Soviet agriculture today. Sasha’s grandfather was dekulakized twice: the first time was because of a winnowing machine. Anyone who had any type of machinery was called a kulak. The second time his house and the outbuildings were torn down, apparently because the family simply went on about its business of working their land. The grandfather never used hired labor, because his family was big enough to get by without it, and he was also the kind of man who could do anything he turned his hand to, including sewing the children’s clothes on a Singer sewing machine. He also had a gramophone, and they took that too. Sasha’s mother was then only eight years old, but she remembers that her father said, "That’s the way it is," and several days later, joined the kolkhoz. He never believed in the promised utopia, but he did work as honestly as he had for
himself, and he died leaving nothing for his heirs but a photograph, which his daughter hung on
the wall, but she couldn't bear to look at it. She was her father's favorite daughter, and he sent
her away to study in Rybinsk to be a polishing-machine operator. She didn't get a chance to
work very long, because she was sent away to the front, where she worked in a field hospital
as a nurse at a bandaging station. She came home alive, but rather old for marriage as peasants
consider it. She and her husband went away to Magadan, where her husband was killed in an
automobile accident. She returned home with young Sasha in hand, and pregnant with the
second child, a daughter. The salary of a milkmaid was insufficient, so after pasturing the
cows, she also went haying at night. For thirteen years she worked in the kolkhoz and in the
fourteenth year she went away to the city and became a janitor in order to have an apartment
right away. They gave her one room, in which she lived with the two children and her mother.
When Sasha got out of the army he brought his wife, and they lived there long enough to have
two children. Finally, they were given a three-room apartment, but Sasha was only truly happy
on the farm, and his women supported him in this, because he, like his grandfather, could do
anything. His friends said that if he couldn't do it, no one could. He started with two cows and
two calves, and he made a small tractor out of spare parts. He took on a ten-thousand ruble
loan, using part of it to buy another tractor with a rake attachment, for which he was given a
discount. Then he got a license to cut down trees and sawed them on a machine he made
himself. For the time being he put the bulls in an abandoned barn. You could see in his eyes
that he was exhausted, and, as a result, he was careless with an axe and nearly cut off his own
leg. This left his wife to manage the farm as best she could. Sasha ran away from the hospital
and tried to cut hay while on crutches. Just then two friends said that they were willing to go
shares with him to help out, but when push came to shove, they backed out.

He had been given barely a hectare of land per head of livestock, and to feed bulls, you need, at a minimum, two or three hectares to grass and one to grain. The sovkhoz got 98 kilograms of meat from each hectare, but demanded 260 from its renters. By the time winter came, Sasha, for lack of anything else, gave them the hay that he had cut. Each bull should have been given a ton of concentrates per year, and the sovkhoz had promised him only one and a half tons for all seven, measured out by teaspoonsful. So Sasha bought two tons of buckwheat groats and made kasha for his calves. By January they had eaten it all up and were mooing with hunger, forcing Sasha to drive around to the neighboring shops on his tractor, buying bread, which caused him great shame.

Sasha Bozhko ended up selling the meat to the sovkhoz at the state price of 2 rubles and 10 kopeks per kilogram, and the sovkhoz then resold it to the state for twice as much, taking advantage of the supplemental payments the state gives.

The result was that Sasha decided to give up fattening bulls and take on sheep instead, or maybe five cows, who would at least give both milk and meat, and who don't need as much concentrate. He might even dig a small pond in order to have fish for himself, or build a windmill, so as not to be dependent on the electric network.

It is hard to agree with Nikitina that Sasha's problems would be solved if only he owned the land. Clearly he suffered from trying to do too much alone. Even with the help of his wife and small daughters, he was over-extended. The case of Mikhail Dlaukhian may be different. He tells the following story about his desire to work the land: his grandmother and grandfather entered the kolkhoz in the village of Krym, not far from Rostov, with their plot of land, cattle,
draught animals, and even a harvesting machine, which made them close to being wealthy. In 1933, failure to fulfill the plan for supplying grain to the state was considered sabotage, and the order went out to gather up everything, so that rich and poor were finally equal. On the Don, people starved collectively. His grandfather and grandmother died within five days of each other and were buried side by side in a winding-sheet, since coffins were at a premium that year. His father immediately fled the scene to Rostov, where he worked for 26 years in the hot shop of Rostsel’mash (the largest tractor factory in the USSR, and the object of constant criticism for the way in which they have not met the demand for tractors). At age 55 he went on pension, and he spent it renting land on some farm growing vegetables and melons or fattening cattle. Djlaukhian followed his example, and for 17 years considered himself free and independent. (This implies that, at least in the south of Russia independent farmers continued to exist along with collectivized agriculture.)

Djlaukhian has some thoughts about whether he should be quite so proud of being a free and independent renter. He says that the fact that part of his pay was given in natural form (part of the harvest for achieving 10-25% above plan) made him not quite as independent as he thought. He decided that what he needed was the land, and he began to ask around. The farm, the rural Soviet, the raion Soviet, and the Oblast Agricultural-Industrial Union told him that there was no land, so he began to travel around himself looking for it, even as far as Krasnodar Krai, but he was still refused. If he saw a notice in the paper that some place was being used in a shiftless or criminal manner, he’d turn up. One example was the Niva Sovkhoz, a subsidiary of Rostsel’mash. This enterprise got a million rubles of metal and various kinds of building materials, but they managed to squander it all and end up with a loss. No one seems
to care. He helped organize the Association of Peasant Farms and Cooperatives of Russia (AKKOR). He met with Ryzhkov, who invited him to leave a letter asking for help. This request was made in January 1990, and he knows that it’s going through channels. A law has been adopted because of this kind of agitation, but he himself doesn’t have any land and he is still bombarding Ryzhkov with telegrams. In May he got an answer to his telegram on the Oblast level, attaching there answer of March 30th, which explains that according to Article 26 of the Basic Land Code for the USSR and the Union Republics about giving land to individual peasants, the distribution is made as the result of a declaration on the individual’s part and a resolution on the part of the rural Soviet at the raion level. According to the Iuzhgiprozem Institute, a sovkhoz in one of the raions he had traveled in could give him the “unmanageable strips of land” [cherespolosnye] after they had been appropriated according to Articles 9 and 6. This is a standard response, inasmuch as he has several kilograms of paper like it. He asked for machines, but the Oblast Agricultural Industrial Union told him that first he had to be giving produce, and they had no power to give him land, since the local Soviets didn’t have any. They suggest he become a renter. Naturally enough, he doesn’t understand why there is a law which isn’t working.

Izvestiia’s reporter goes around asking whether Djlaughkian will get the land. He is told that Djlaughkian will, because the Oblast has made its Temporary Decree (to allow the allotment of land before the passage of a Republic or Union law on the land). Others doubt that this will have any effect, since there simply isn’t any land, and the only way to get it is to take it away from people who are misusing it, and it hasn’t been decided how this should be done. Iuzhgiprozem Institute has named a prime example of a farm which uses land poorly, but the
farm asks whether the person really wants to go to court over it, so for the time being nothing much is being done. The Institute proposes that you can calculate the effectiveness of the use of every hectare by an average index established by the land survey, and by this index the farm is only getting 100 rubles of profit per hectare. However, the law does not say how the land should be taken away from the farm in a case of misuse. Unresolved questions like this make one of the people Izvestiia interviewed say that Djlaukhian will not get the land, in effect because the bureaucracy is still in place. Djlaukhian had even gone so far as to bring in a television crew to show how poorly the sovkhoz was being run. There is even an isolated farmstead, where the old people are left without anything to eat or without medical help and have to pay with their own money to put in electricity.

None of the locals like this particular kind of publicity, and this may be why Djlaukhian hasn’t gotten any land. By law he is supposed to apply to the rural Soviet, which is supposed to give him land, and the Soviet is supposed to use the money it gets to improve the life of the pensioners. However, the real problem is that the director of the sovkhoz is also the chairman of the rural Soviet. The director of the agro-industrial complex which is responsible for the sovkhoz, who is also a deputy to the raion Soviet, is against giving Djlaukhian land. The chairman of the raion Soviet is the First Secretary of the Raion Committee of the Communist Party, and he too is against giving Djlaukhian land; he says that Djlaukhian ought to take himself off to the non-chernozem. At this point Izvestiia’s reporter tells Djlaukhian that he’s done what he can namely, he went around with the "Temporary Decree" in his hands. In the meantime Djlaukhian has been offered the post of head of one of the departments of the sovkhoz where he applied for land. Izvestiia’s reporter comments wryly that this is an example of how the old
guard has adapted to the slogan “Power to the Soviets. Land to the Peasants” (Izvestiia, 9/IX/90: 2).

In the RSFSR, a State Committee on Land Reform has been set up, with a staff of 100 in Moscow, and branches are planned in other parts of the RSFSR at local levels. The Committee’s job will be to consult on land regulations, settle disputes not needing a court’s intervention, manage the state’s land survey, get topographic and geodesic information and do geo-botanical and soil research. The Committee will employ legal experts, geodesists, soil experts, geobotanists, economists, ecologists, and others. There are at present only 2400 specialists on land-regulation in the country, and 16,000 will be needed. V.N. Khlystun, the Committee’s head, says that the process of land reform will take ten years, because it is not enough to distribute the land, its rational use must be assured, including setting the proper price for the land and taxes based on that price. It is possible that 16-17 billion rubles will be spent to implement land reform (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 22/I/91: 2). However, Izvestiia (6/II/91: 2) asserts that in some oblasts, committees on land reform have not yet been set up and every excuse is being made to drag out the process, so that the former system of land use will be preserved. V. Khlystun, addressing the second congress of AKKOR, said that in Volgograd Oblast, a decision had been made to put 10% of the agricultural land into a fund for distribution to farmers. This, he said, did not contradict the law and was quite suitable for other regions of the country as an example of a serious, state attitude toward the matter. However, a farmer from Nizhegorod Oblast said that the more than 50 staff-members released from the oblast agricultural-industrial enterprise were now sitting on the land commissions, with the result that the very same people who bothered her for months until she got her land were now in a position
to say whether other peasants got land (Izvestia 6/II/91: 2).

In fact, the growth of private farming has been very slow and erratic in the Russian republic. In early 1990, there were 231 peasant farms, and in February 1991, according to the State Committee on Statistics for the RSFSR, there are 4,433 farms registered. Since 203,900 hectares have been set aside for distribution, this works out to 46 hectares per farm. However, half of those registered have allotments of less than 20 hectares, and in Smolensk, Volgograd, Penza, Orenburg Oblasts and some other regions, the average farmer has 80-140 hectares, and (by way of comparison), a person pasturing cattle in Yakutia or Kalmykia, or Chita Oblast might have 600 hectares. Registering and having a bank account appears to be the least difficult part; 690 would-be farmers still have not received any land. In Rostov Oblast there are only two family farms, compared to 182 in the Kuban. In Lipetsk Oblast, there are six registered family farms and more than 1,000 who would like to register (Izvestia 25/II/91: 1).

**A Quiet, Bloodless Civil War With Farmers**

An Izvestia reporter has described the situation in Penza Oblast as a quiet, bloodless civil war between the establishment and the peasant farmer. Viktor Chumak was offered the village of Aleksandrovo-Rostovka, a subdivision of Lenin Sovkhoz. Before Chumak arrived to farm the 660 hectares, the village contained, in his words, three-and-a-half old ladies and their grandchildren in the summertime. The first thing he did was to construct five houses at once. He then began to collect equipment from various places, using a half-million ruble line of credit extended by Agroprombank. In other circumstances, Agroprombank has required that kolkhozy
and sovkhozy guarantee the loans of the farmers, but in Chumak’s case, the bank apparently liked his style, and in fact, that kind of success has turned him into a manager, rather than just a farmer. The Izvestiia reporter would like to see Chumak’s independent relationship with the bank the rule rather than the exception (Izvestiia 1/X/90 : 3). In Vologda Oblast, the chairman of Zavet Kolkhoz in Mezhdurech’e Raion, and even officials at the oblast level and higher, seem to be doing their best to discourage farmers among them, but to do them justice, if they help the farmers, local authorities have to use supplies and money already insufficient for the needs of the kolkhoz and sovkhoz system (Izvestiia 1/VII/90: 2). The most serious problem hindering the growth of new forms of agricultural production in Vologda Oblast is the extent to which the kolkhoz or sovkhoz is the de facto arbiter of how successful renters or farmers will be. Sergei Igumnov (who farms with his wife and 17-year-old son) bought a farm, two tractors, a truck and 40 head of cattle from the Lenin Kolkhoz. He pays half of what he gets from his now 90 cows and calves to extinguish his loan. Igumnov offers the kolkhoz chairman a calf for slaughter at 2 rubles 16 kopeks per kilogram, the state purchase price. The kolkhoz chairman thinks that the 37% extra payment he will receive is his and not Igumnov’s. In fact, Lenin Kolkhoz’s extra payment is less than Korobitsyn Kolkhoz gets (49%) or Zaria Kolkhoz (89%), but no one really can say why. Igumnov says that in that case it is more advantageous to sell the meat elsewhere, but the chairman says that he cannot, and even though Igumnov says that the calves are his, from the chairman’s point of view, they are from kolkhoz cows. Igumnov protests that since he bought them, they are his, and the chairman counters that the Raion Agro-Industrial Organization [RAPO] requires that he keep them on the books as kolkhoz cows.

V. Molchanov, a comrade from a trading cooperative Igumnov helped form, says that
the buying agent from the raion consumer cooperative offered him two grivna [twenty kopeks] per kilogram of potatoes, minus a discount for future loss and shrinkage, and when he hired a truck to take them to Vologda, the raion consumer coop said he was using nitrates (he was not), and would not let him trade on the market. He ended by giving a pensioner one sack of potatoes for very ten he sold. He had to intervene three times for the pensioner because the pensioner was being pestered, and he realized about 60 kopeks per kilogram, about half of which went to cover his expenses. Even so, his trading cooperative is preparing to open shops in Siamzha (the raion center) and Vologda, and have advertised on the oblast radio that they will sell meat, milk and vegetables to enterprises that will provide services. The state and the peasant are both big losers when it comes to the sale of milk and meat, but the reporter says: "If the sum of state subsidies is divided among everyone who receives it, each of us from our real wages puts into the budget 56 rubles monthly for additional payments for milk, meat, and other produce...." (Izvestiia 27/V/90 3)

What Do Renters Want?

In 1989, in a effort to define the needs and aspirations of the growing class of renters, a survey was done of workers in a number of enterprises in three cities of Kursk Oblast by the Sector on Rural Social Infrastructure of the USSR-wide Research Institute of Agricultural Economics. While 60% of those surveyed supported the idea of renting, 11% saw themselves participating, and then only under conditions of free landholding. Most of these people were male, three-quarters of them 20-39 years of age (with the younger group 25-29 predominating).
When they migrated to the city, three quarters of them had secondary and incomplete secondary education; more than 60% had families. Nearly three quarters had lived in the city 5-10 years or more. Almost 80% worked in industry, about 90% at physical labor requiring average and high skills. At the moment of migration to the city, only 16.3% had an income of more than 80 rubles, but at the present time, 65% do. Before migration, most had lived in houses without conveniences, and now more than half have their own apartments with conveniences, 2.3% are renting space within private apartments and the rest are living in dorms or communal apartments.

Most of those in the survey said that they had come for better wages, better housing and better working conditions, and to have access to industrial goods. About half had actually succeeded in doing so in each category. More than 37.2% are not completely satisfied, and 18.6% are dissatisfied with how they spend their leisure time. Only 23.3% thought that life in the city was better than in the countryside, and 46.5% thought that some things were better and some things had remained the same. Most (60-75%) thought life in the countryside was more peaceful, the air cleaner, relations among people were better, and there was the opportunity to have a plot and grow one’s own food. In addition, 90% still had relatives and friends in the countryside; and most either visited weekly, or once or twice a month, to help gather the harvest on the personal plot, or just to rest.

It is important, the head of this research project, V. Belen’kii, wrote in Sel’skaia zhizn’ (14/II/90: 2) that those who return to the villages be trained in entrepreneurial and management skills, and that they have modern farming technology available, including repair services, which at the present time are poorly organized: two agricultural workers are served by one service
person, compared to a ratio of one to five in developed capitalist countries. A non-agricultural network of industrial enterprises and institutions should be set up to provide additional employment, and the transportation network improved to allow commuting in the agricultural off-season. Families taking up renting should be given tax advantages and discount prices. There must also be “rational cooperation” among renters and with the kolkhozy involved.

The same research institute questioned 397 persons in 1989 who had migrated from the countryside 15 years ago or less. From 50 to 70 percent would return to the countryside only with radical changes in material conditions in the countryside. Though few of those surveyed attended theaters, concerts, exhibitions and sporting events when they migrated to the city, 40% of them did at the time of the survey. Before migration, they had used only 23 kinds of cultural and consumer services, but in 1989, their range was extended to 38, many of which are not available in most rural areas. It has been calculated that 350-380 billion rubles are needed for the most pressing construction, and to bring the rural areas up to standard, more than a trillion rubles are needed. Where, V. Belen’kii asks (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 1/VIII/90: 2), would the money come from, considering that the present five-year plan only 60 billion and in the thirteenth five-year plan, 120 billion are designated? The writer thinks that the resources can come from within agriculture itself (but not, after a point, by raising procurement prices). The rural population itself can be encouraged to spend its money, with urban enterprises investing shares. He supports the suggestion of the agrarian bloc in the Congress (quoted above) about curtailing construction in large cities. Special public funds can be encouraged (like “Veteran,” which I will discuss below).

Belen’kii’s Research Institute also questioned about a thousand renters, primarily in Orel,
Penza, and Voronezh Oblasts (RSFSR), and in the Moldavian, Belorussian and Kirgiz SSRs. The respondents were mostly young skilled workers, among whom 36% had general secondary education, 7% had professional-technical, 28% specialized secondary and higher; 85% of the equipment operators and animal-husbandry workers had a rating of first and second class. When asked to rate their own skills, 72% said that they were average or low. About 80% thought that they urgently needed to raise their skill-levels (previously they saw no need). They mostly wanted to learn how to preserve, process and market their produce, as well as learning electric gas welding and how to be a setup machinist (because of the high cost of these services in rural areas). They also wanted to learn construction and crafts. One farmer in Orel Oblast who is raising 700 pigs has six skills, but he would also like to learn economics and veterinary science.

In the opinion of 62% of those questioned, a renter needs three or more skills, but only 52% actually have two agricultural skills, and only 14% have three or more. Special centers for training administrators (whose skill-levels renters thought lower than their own) are doing fairly well, but work on the spot is on a very low level, especially training in economics; even the teachers are poorly prepared in this area. Educational institutions are not prepared to change things. More and better textbooks, with facilities at the raion level, would help. There is some experience along these lines in Belorussia, utilizing agricultural facilities already in place, but serious restructuring of agricultural education, particularly in the rural professional-technical schools will be necessary (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 1/VII/90: 2). Another commentator, looking at Belgorod, Kursk and Orel Oblasts (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 12/XII90: 2), pointed out that if renters have to rely on pitchforks and shovels, they won’t last long. Although some measures are in place to provide the necessary technology and training, the record is spotty at best, and as the case of
Leonid Peshekhonov (discussed above) shows, too much depends on individual relationships with local authorities.

Would training have helped V. Novikova, village of Rovenki, Lugansk Oblast? She and her husband contracted with the kolkhoz to raise melons, and in spite of a cold rainy season, they met the plan and were given part payment in melons. Leaving her husband to sell melons produced above the plan, Novikova took a leave, rented a truck one way and set out to sell melons in Tula. Before entering Tula Oblast, she and her son were hassled by drunken traffic checkers at Elets, who retained her documents pertaining to the trucking operation, supposedly because they were incorrectly filled out, but probably because, on principle, she had given them no money.

When she arrived in Tula, she was not allowed into the market, because she was told that the entrance tariff was 1,000 rubles, plus another 300 to unload (she had only eight tons of melons). She was told that she could not do the unloading herself, and that she needed to pay 500 rubles immediately for the metal enclosure for her melons, and 100 rubles for each day of trade. She went to see the market administrators but they refused even to talk to her. At that point she was approached by "young people of Caucasian origin," who tried to buy her load for ten kopeks a kilogram, which she refused. It was now Saturday night, and she has no permission to travel beyond Tula, and no chance to get new documents from the rental agency. The captain at the State Motor Vehicle Inspection Station let her leave in the direction of Moscow, where there were no more check points, but he advised her not to go to Moscow, because things were worse there than in Tula. About 40 kilometers away there is the small town of Aleksino (population about 200,000). If she didn’t sell her melons that Sunday, she should
give up. When she arrived, the market was locked up, but since the market was on the grounds of a church, the priest opened the gate. She spent the whole night fending off the attentions of young people with suggestions for selling her melons.

The next morning brought still other problems. Workers at the market demanded that she vacate immediately; they refused to analyze the condition of the melons, or to provide scales, saying that it would have to wait until Monday. At nine o’clock the market director appeared and demanded that she leave. Melons were being sold for a ruble a kilogram and there were only four sellers, all of Caucasian origin; they offered her 12 kopeks per kilogram. Novikova refused, parked her truck a short distance from the market, purchased a scale in a shop, and began to sell melons for 50 kopeks. A long line formed and trade was brisk, even though the young Caucasians came out to threaten her for driving down the price. By evening she had sold only half the load, but she was advised by well-meaning people to leave before the Caucasians could carry out their threats. After spending the night at the Motor Vehicle Inspection Station near Tula, she hunted up the city trade organization and sold them the remaining melons for 25 kopeks a kilogram. She had paid 986 rubles for the truck, one way, and at first she wanted to write to Moscow to complain about all she had been through, but once home she understood why only independent contractors (shabashniki) like her family were growing melons and onions. It had been no joke to work 20 hectares of melons, and after her experience, she and her husband agreed to grow onions on one hectare.

Novikova says that she has read that people are afraid of starving, but not she, because she knows how to feed herself and her family. She has read that the government plans to purchase vegetable oil abroad. Her family alone could produce 1,200 kilograms of oil. All she
asks in return is a mini-tractor or "Moskvich" truck. After all, she sold the state a ton of veal at state prices and has taken on ten piglets and a calf for sale in winter. If the government can't do better than hassle people who want to feed the country, "well, then let them stand in lines." (Izvestiia 2/II/91: 3)

Help for the Elderly

In November 1990, the Federation of Trade Unions of the Agro-Industrial Complex, the Editorial Board of Sel'skaia zhizn' and Central Television's program "Stupen'" set up a philanthropic fund with 300,000 rubles, with the aim of helping, among others, the two million single rural women, the seven million people living in villages once judged to be without prospects and thus now without services, and about twenty million rural pensioners (Sel'skaia zhizn' 21/XI/90: 1; see also The Station Relay Vol. 4, Nos. 1-5, pp. 76-77 for an example of the plight of rural veterans of World War II). As of mid-January 1991, most contributions to the fund had come from the rural community itself. Aleksandr Karanda, commenting on the need for the Veteran Fund, says that there are very few homes for old people on kolkhozy and sovkhozy, because no banks are giving credits for building them, and only a very brave and good-hearted kolkhoz chairman would embark on this kind of philanthropy under such conditions (Sel'skaia zhizn' 16/I/91: 3). In Ul'ianovsk Oblast, however, a decision has been made to curtail urban construction and devote the funds to rural areas, and they have a lot to do, because as late as 1987, when a program of construction of homes for the aged was begun, the oblast had no such facilities (Sel'skaia zhizn' 15/XII/90: 1).
In many cases, the elderly have simply fallen through the cracks. A 66-year-old disabled World War II veteran in Iadrinsk Raion of the Chuvash ASSR in the Volga region writes to Sel’skaia zhizn’ (12/XII/89: 2) that in December 1988 when his kolkhoz gave out grain to disabled and pensioners, he should have gotten some. The 40-year-old kolkhoz chairman, however, judges that the older man is not a kolkhoznik, causing the veteran considerable emotional pain as he remembers the slogan "No one forgotten," and wonders if it applies to him. A few months later, every resident on kolkhoz territory except him was sold peas. It is true that he is not a kolkhoznik, but he did teach for 35 years in a neighboring raion: "Note: not in another state and not even in another republic, but in a neighboring raion. Can this be a reason to exclude me from the list? Or was it perhaps my letter last year to the editor of Sel’skaia zhizn’ about economic shortcomings on the kolkhoz?" Rural World War II veterans in Ul’ianovsk Oblast, on the lower Volga, feel so neglected and insulted by the treatment they receive that they are turning in their Party cards (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 1/VII/ 90: 2 ). A woman pensioner writes to Sel’skaia zhizn’ (21/VIII/90: 1) that in her village of Nikolaevskoe, Kasimov Raion, Riazan Oblast, there isn’t even soap, and a telephone was installed only for use on election day. "What have we done? It seems we never ran away from work, or abandoned the kolkhoz in a difficult time. We ourselves starved, but we fed the country. But now no one bothers with us neither the Raion Committee of the Party nor the newly elected Raion Soviet. Another woman writes from the settlement of B. Pochinki, Riazan Oblast that her Red October Kolkhoz recently celebrated a harvest festival by handing out sausages, but only to those who had worked that summer, not to pensioners; but hasn’t she, after 47 years of work in the kolkhoz, earned the right to a bit of sausage even if her son is a major-general and even if she
she does have some livestock? (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 16/I/91: 3)

In recent years, the rural population of the Central Chernozem Economic Region has decreased by 25%, in the Volga-Viatka area by 23%, in the Central region by 22%, and in the Volga area by 17%. In 75% of the small rural inhabited places, there are no consumer service locations, and 52% of the large places have no medical facilities (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 15/XII: 1). As M.G. Pankratova (1990: 119) notes, more than a quarter of the population of the non-Chernozem is of pension age; in Pskov, Tver and Riazan Oblasts, one-third of the population consists of pensioners.

Chern Raion Opens Its Doors

Chern Raion in Tula Oblast is an example of a dying agricultural region; it is fairly large, 100 kilometers from end to end, with 100,000 hectares of plowland, and 25 kolkhozy and sovkhozy, of which seven are officially categorized as weak, but in fact 18 of them are. This is a lovely area, immortalized in Turgenev’s A Sportsman’s Sketches. In Turgenevo, before the Second World War, 450 children were enrolled in school, and at present only 50 are. The villages are almost deserted, with one village having 18 households and 29 residents. In Bezhin Lug, they began building an irrigation system costing about 100,000 rubles, which was never completed, and which left the ground so torn up that hardly any grass can be harvested on it anymore. At present there are 17 little villages, most of them inhabited by one or two old people. In 1951, all the little kolkhozy that corresponded to the villages were united into one very big one, and the schools and shops were closed in the villages which were considered to
be without prospects. The young people started to go away to Tula, and then to neighboring Mtsensk, as factories were built there. There have been nine chairmen of the kolkhoz, and the present one does what he can, never having an extra kopek to put back into the economy. Last year they got 13 tsentners a hectare of grain and 70 tsentners of potatoes. The kolkhoz has 650 cows, from which they got 2,076 liters of milk each. The reporter says that none of the 75 households who own cows in the Turgenevo Rural Soviet would put up with such yields. The reason that the yield on the kolkhoz is so miserable is that there are only old people left to do the milking. It is said that the milkmaids are drunkards, and the reporter cites the case of a woman with a grown son and a little daughter who was in prison for seven years, and who is still being fined for her behavior. The villages are empty of men except for those like one the reporter spoke to, who had been in prison for two long terms, and who is now suffering from tuberculosis. And then there are the bureaucrats, as many as 30 people, even on the smallest farms, who certainly do push around a lot of paper (Sel'skaia zhizn' 11/III/89: 3).

In an attempt to revitalize Chern Raion, where before World War II there were 120,000 persons, and now there are 22,000, 40% of them pensioners, the Raion Soviet has notified the Minister of Defense that it can give employment to demobilized soldiers, and their wives, since there is a great need not only for agricultural personnel but for teachers, cultural workers and medical personnel, most of whom have traditionally been women; construction workers are also needed, and there are opportunities for setting up building-material enterprises. The soldiers will have the choice of either working in the kolkhozy and sovkhozy, or of setting up their own farms and cooperatives (Izvestiia 2/II/91: 2). A. Pushkar' (Izvestiia 8/III/91: 3) notes that Chern Raion is so much in need of workers that the authorities have even accepted repeat offenders
who are not allowed to live in Moscow for "re-education," but this decision has only added to the general wastefulness, disorganization and drunkenness.

Another development of considerable significance for Chern Raion is the recent arrival of Dukhobors from the Georgian SSR, where they had been living for about 150 years. To someone acquainted with the history of sectarian religious groups in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, this development is, as they say, a case of déjà vu all over again, down to the suggestion that emigre farmers of Slavic origin be invited to return home (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 12/XII/89 4). This time, Dukhobors are on the move because of ethnic unrest in the Georgian SSR and, as the Canadian editor of Iskra told me, because Dukhobor young people in Georgian rural areas lacked job opportunities.

In addition to stories about them in Soviet newspapers, their progress has been closely followed by Canadian Dukhobors, who sent a construction brigade to Chern Raion to build housing for the settlers (see the photo story in Izvestiia 26/IX/90: 3). The choice of Chern supposedly is based on sentiment, since Leo Tolstoy, one of the Dukhobors’ benefactors, had an estate in the neighborhood. Much is made of the "return" of the Dukhobors from exile in Georgia, but less is said about the reason this group of Dukhobors wanted to leave an area where, as one report has it, it was possible for the wife to work as a milker in the village of Gorelovka, and the husband to be a tractor driver, and some months they might earn as much as 500 rubles. In the Georgian SSR, the couple had a large brick house with six rooms, and a fair amount of livestock (cows, bullocks, sheep, and chickens), all of which they had to sell. They are currently housed in a smaller, four-room house, but at least it has hot and cold running water, a toilet, and a bath, with a barn for animals, which they do not yet have but intend to get.
The Dukhobors have settled in, and last year sent eight young men and women away to school, four of whom entered the Orel Agricultural Institute, two entered the Tula Pedagogical Institute, and the others are in the Orel Agricultural Technical School. The group has 230 people of working age, 60% of whom are young people. They have settled in a village named Arkhangel’skoe, where some of their neighbors are elderly Molokans, a group with which, historically, the Dukhobors have had close ties. They were given building materials and prefabricated housing, and were supposed to put up 120 houses, but they only managed to put up 32, so that half of them are still living in heated trailers. They were given agricultural equipment like a DT-75 tractor, a cultivator, 7 harrows, heifers, 7 young ewes and rams, 11 tons of grain-fodder, 150 tons of straw, 100 tons of silage, timothy grass seed, apple-tree seedlings, and current-bushes. Construction workers gave them a concrete mixer, and the machinery builders gave them several scooters and books by Russian writers, intended to be the beginnings of a library (Sel’skaia zhizn’ 30/I/91: 1, 3).

According to another report, these gifts were presented at a welcoming ceremony, at which the chairman of a neighboring kolkhoz said:

We thought for a long time about our gift. At first we wanted to give a tractor, but then we decided: after five to seven years it would turn to scrap... And we agreed on one point. There is a belief that if a person plants even one tree on the earth, he perpetuates himself. And from our hearts we give you a thousand apple seedlings, a thousand current bushes, and two thousand strawberry plants. (Iskra [the bilingual journal of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (Dukhobors) in Grand Forks, British Columbia] 1991, No. 1724, p. 43).

The USSR Finance Ministry, according to the report in Iskra, gave the kolkhoz 3.8 million rubles, but Pushkar’ asserts that "despite loud declarations in governmental decisions,"
the basic responsibility for the settlers is assumed by the host raion. The chairman of the new kolkhoz is a man who for 13 years in Georgia had been the head of a quite profitable kolkhoz, but who recognizes that here he will be starting all over again at age 58. The kolkhoz chairman also says that the Dukhobors have appealed to the Georgian government for reparations for the property they had to leave behind them. At present, the school that the children attend is four kilometers away. There is supposedly a good kindergarten, but at least one mother considers that her two-year-old son need not attend it because there are two grandmothers in the house. (Sel'skaia zhizn' 30/I/91: 1, 3. See also reports in Iskra, 1990 No. 1705, pp. 8-11, 70-73; No. 1708, pp. 15-17, 21-23, 50-52; No. 1709, p. 13; No. 1710, pp. 3-6, 47-52; No. 1712, pp. 7,74; No. 1713, p. 61; No. 1720, pp. 22-23; No. 1721 [containing the report of the Tula Aid Project], pp. 40-61; 1990, 1722, pp. 68-70; 1723, pp. 4-9, 32-39.)

Canadian Dukhobors are divided over the issue of return to Russia on a permanent basis (see Iskra 1990, No. 1713, pp. 25-28, 53-54). Several generations of Canadian Dukhobor students have studied the Russian language in Russian teachers' institutes, and Canadian Dukhobor leaders regularly visit Goreloe and other Dukhobor villages in the Georgian SSR, as well as Yasnaya Polyana, where Tolstoy is buried; they have also lent support to Soviet peace efforts (see The Station Relay 1987, Vol. 2, No. 5, pp. 12-13). In Canada, their attempts to preserve the Dukhobor cultural and spiritual heritage is remarkable enough to have captivated the great-grandson of Tolstoy, and to have drawn the attention of Soviet folklorists, ethnographers and film-makers (see Iskra 1990, No. 1713, pp. 6, 66-74; 1714, pp. 4-17, 62-77; 1719, pp. 5-6, 45; 1720, pp. 26, 42-44). A. Pushkar' (Sel'skaia zhizn' 8/III/91: 3) clearly sees the Dukhobors who have settled in Arkhangel'skoe as an exotic ethnic remnant of an
independent peasantry which was strangled by a "totalitarian system," which heedlessly allowed Arkhangelskoe and the Central Russian heartland to lose population.

**Progress in Some Places**

Leonid Peshekhonov's blast at the system points up the failures of collectivization, but it should be also be said that there are places in Orel Oblast where the kolkhozy and sovkhozy and the raion Party Secretary, for example, in Uritskii Raion, are much more supportive of family farming. In August 1989, there were about 70 family farms. Orel participates with a small Finnish city (Nokia) in a Sister City relationship which has allowed a group of would-be farmers to visit Finland and see the arrangements in the countryside there. They have, with some apparent success, begun to transplant the Finnish model, but, of course, it is only a beginning (Izvestiia 6/VIII/89: 2).

The Rodina Kolkhoz in Vologda Raion, Vologda Oblast, has taken on 70 new families, and its chairman, who has been on the job for three years, has done even better than his much-acclaimed predecessor. The kolkhoz currently has eight million rubles in income, and gets six thousand kilograms of milk per year from its cows. The average wage is 400 rubles a month, with a bonus for all after the yearly accounting. Veterans get a monthly pension of 120-150 rubles a month, and they are exempted from payments for communal services. (Sel'skaia zhizn' 20/II/91: 1) The USSR-wide minimum pension is supposed to be 70 rubles, but reports from rural areas suggest that many rural residents are still getting less.

Pytalovo Raion, in Pskov Oblast is on the border of the RSFSR with the Latvian SSR,
and a two hour drive brings one to the border with Belorussia and Estonia. The results of a three-year study indicates that renting is only one of the possible variations of land management. All the agencies involved in Pytalovo Raion geared up for a crash program of renting, but by 1987 it became clear that the program was being resisted not only by specialists and administrators, but by a significant percentage of ordinary workers, perhaps because of a media campaign based on "unobjective" material. However, in 1988, the situation became more stable. On 12 kolkhozy and sovkhozy, 887 persons, 30% of all those engaged in agriculture, are involved in 122 rent collectives and 66 peasant farms. These people are the best-prepared part of the population, in a professional sense: research showed that almost 12% of the specialists with higher and specialized secondary education and 69% of the graduates of rural Professional-Technical Schools were involved, as were 56% of workers employed for more than five years; 84% were 30-55 years of age. In addition, renters accounted for 71% of the raion's net production. Of the 122 rent collectives in 1988, 37 finished the year with more expenses than income. This appears to have had something to do with their need for credit in the first year, but the reporter does not consider them bankrupt. On the Artemovskii Sovkhoz, 17 rent collectives used commercial credit, for which they got building materials, metals, and young livestock, machinery, and other property, loans which they were supposed to pay back over a two to three year period. In Pskov oblast, in 1986-1988, the average yearly supply of processed cattle grew by 17%, but in Pytalovo raion, it grew by 52%; the production of milk grew by 11 and 36% respectively. The average growth of net production for the past three years in Pytalovo raion was 9%, while in the oblast as a whole, it fell by 2% (Sel'skaia zhizn' I/XI/89:2).
In 1990, when American papers printed nothing but reports of food shortages, I was surprised to see in an article headlined "If Only It Were This Way Everywhere" (Sel'skaia zhizn' 8/IX/90: 2) that provisioning of the city of Tambov has actually improved during the year. Sausages and pork could be bought without coupons and each resident of the town has been able to get 67 kilograms of meat [meaning that their consumption was at or above the USSR level]. People also were able to get butter, milk, sour cream, kefir, and yogurt-type products, and heavy cream was for sale most of the time. The Oblast Executive Committee explained that this is the result of a deliberate policy to concentrate on supplying the region [as opposed to draining everything off to Moscow or Leningrad]. That's well and good, but some people have forgotten that many of the villages in Tambov Oblast are full of pensioners who can no longer supply themselves, not to mention other groups like young people and the intelligentsia. In Sampur Raion, a so-called small food program, which actually functions, has been worked out. Nine-hundred tons of meat, or 80% more than in 1989, was purchased from the population, and by the end of 1990, purchasing agents expected to double that. They know that all you have to do is give the people fodder, and also provide building materials to make shelters for the cattle and fowl. There are some problems with processing sour cream and cheese, but the necessary equipment has already been ordered. On one sovkhoz, for each kilogram of milk produced, individuals are given a half kilogram of hay, a kilogram of straw, and 200 grams of concentrates. The private plot of one couple had produced more than two tons of milk from two cows, and they also have a fair number of fowl and piglets. The reporter also saw places in which processing shops and the grain factory were being renovated. As a result, the population in the area has stabilized. In Sampur itself, they are also doing something about
the old bakery, so that it produces cookies and other baked goods. There is a sausage factory that produces 18 kinds of sausages. There is even a shop for producing 1,500 liters of non-alcoholic beverages per shift. One problem they have is that they have almost ceased to produce buckwheat for kasha. In 1988, only 18 tons were produced, but this has changed, thanks to the local Professional-Technical School, which has also produced other deficit crops like millet and peas. They have also built a creamery and are producing cheese, and are actually marketing fruits and berries. A fishery cooperative may be established.

Voronezh Oblast is an area which, in the last decade, has lost about 243,000 persons through outmigration; 254 settlements have disappeared, and 323 schools have been closed. About 100 farms have only 10-15 equipment-operators for 6,000-8,000 hectares of plowland and have to bring in outside help to complete many operations. It was decided to concentrate on building homes so that families would want to return to live in them. The kolkhozy and sovkhozy increased the construction of individual homes from 37,900 square meters in 1987 to 149,000 square meters in 1988. Over a two-year period, 650 houses were sold on the installment plan, and more than 2,500 refurbished houses were sold to kolkhozniks and sovkhoz workers. By the end of this five-year plan, it is expected that urban enterprises will help to rejuvenate 75 villages. In 1987, a study was done of 464 dairy farms with low milk yields, the majority of which had no conveniences whatever. Now every large farm has consumer services and hot meals, and there are 450 houses and medical treatment centers for the livestock-handlers, as well as 768 sauna and health centers, which are also used by the local population. Only about 8,000 houses have natural gas, but there are plans, during the next five-year-plan, to fit 7,000-8,000 apartments with natural gas, to put natural gas in all
raion centers and an additional 230 farms. In 1990, 19 central settlements were connected to their raion center by paved roads. All this has brought about some desired demographic changes. In 1988, about 10,000 persons returned from the city, with an additional 4,000 in the first quarter of 1989. In addition to housing, other incentives are offered, such as free travel and baggage-handling, and a one-time monetary subsidy, free rent for two years, fuel, and free communal services, and at the same time, the reverse migrants kept their places on housing lists in the cities they had left. As the local economy expanded, with new enterprises being built, even girls were able to choose professions. [Inability to do this in the past had led to considerable outmigration on the part of young women, who have increasingly become better educated than men in the same age group.] The productivity of agriculture increased markedly, the profit of kolkhozy and sovkhozy was 780 million rubles, and per capita consumption of meat and milk products increased, even as sales to the state increased by 41 and 43 percent respectively. However, construction and home heating materials are limited. Rural areas should be permitted to use electricity for household needs round the clock, and not only at night (Sel'skaia zhizn' 19/V/89: 2).

By Way of Conclusion

In this essay, I have concentrated on issues reflected in our book The Peasants of Central Russia (reissued in 1988 with a new preface and greatly expanded reading list by Waveland Press), and it has often seemed that little has changed since the mid-1960s. The feeling is reinforced by Soviet journalists and commentators whose parochialism has accustomed them to ignoring the
one lesson anyone surveying the Russian rural scene today must learn: changes are being made, and in some places kolkhozy and sovkhozy and local Soviets are cooperating with each other. This was true even in what is now called “the period of stagnation.” At the same time, it is definitely no credit to the Soviet system that what was wrong with agriculture in the sixties is still wrong with it today, and no party or group really has a speedy cure. Centralized planning has assured that when one limb of the economy aches, it is a sign that the whole body needs attention. It will take many more than 500 days to achieve the parity that agrarians so ardent desire. I see no evidence that Gorbachev is personally responsible for the failure to solve such long-standing problems as those I have discussed. David A.J. Macey (1990:16) suggests that it may take more than 100 years to achieve “the individualization of peasant agriculture” with a gradualist approach which, given the cultural and historical background of the problem, probably “holds the greatest potential for long-term economic and political success.” If we ask, does Russia have the luxury, the answer could be another question, does anyone have a better solution? If Russia has learned anything from Stalinism the answer to the first question may be, perhaps not, and to the second, I would answer, not yet.

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