

Collective Farming in the U.S.S.R.

By A. Gaister

THE main object of the Proletarian Dictatorship is to break down the rule of the bourgeoisie and uproot the foundations of capitalist economy. This demands a number of measures in respect to small peasant undertakings such as will eventually assure the development of large-scale Socialist production in agriculture also. Both Marx and Engels alluded to this, and it was on this theory that Lenin based his plan for the co-operative development of rural economy.

"The proletariat," wrote Marx, "as the government, should undertake measures, the result of which will be that the position of the peasant will directly improve and that he will himself go over to the side of the Revolution. These measures will contain the embryo of the transition from private landed proprietorship to collective ownership; they will facilitate this transition in such a way that the peasant will himself arrive at this by economic means." (*Annals of Marxism* II., p. 98.)

Engels makes a similar observation: "Our task in relation to the small peasants," wrote Engels, "is above all to turn their private production and private property into collectivity, but this should be done, not by force, but by means of example, and the application of public aid for this purpose."

"We shall do everything possible," wrote Engels, further on, "to make it more tolerable for the small peasant to live, to facilitate his transition to collectivity. . . ." "The material losses which in this respect will have to be borne in the interests of the peasants, might seem, from the viewpoint of capitalist economics, to be wasted money. But actually this will constitute an excellent investment of capital because such losses will save perhaps ten times larger sums in the expenditure on social reconstruction as a whole. Consequently, in this respect we can afford to be very generous to the peasants." (*The Peasant Question in Germany and France*.)

This teaching by the founders of revolutionary Marxism as to the lines of development of small peasant economy after the seizure of power by the proletariat was brilliantly ex-

tended by Lenin in the co-operative plan for the development of rural economy. Lenin continually emphasised that "when the proletarian revolution takes place in a country where the proletariat is in a minority, where there is petty-bourgeois production, the rôle of the proletariat in such a country consists in directing the transition of these small undertakings to socialised collective labour." (*Collected Works*, Vol. XVIII., part I., p. 118. Russian Edition.)

The October Revolution in the U.S.S.R. in vanquishing the landowners and bourgeoisie gave a tremendous spurt to the initiative of the masses in developing forms of Socialist construction. The poor and middle peasant sections of the Soviet countryside have widely extended the construction of collective farms—the Socialist form of collective production in agriculture.

The first collective farms to a large extent started as "communes," i.e., large-scale enterprises with common means of production, common labour and equal distribution. The revolutionary enthusiasm of the first years of the Revolution led the constructors of socialised agriculture to create Socialist enterprises of a more consistent type. But this form (collective farms) demands from the small peasant radical changes in the forms and conditions of the production and the conditions of living to which he is accustomed. For this reason, side by side with the Communes, and considerably exceeding them in number, the poor and middle peasant masses threw up a number of other forms of a simpler type, such as artels, societies for joint cultivation of the land, sowing associations, etc. The great variety of forms promoted directly by the builders of large-scale production in the countryside bears witness to the great activity of these sections in their fight for new productive and social relations in the Soviet rural areas.

The Fifteenth Party Congress took place at the time of the change from the restoratory to the reconstruction period in the national economy of the U.S.S.R. Soviet industry had entered this stage slightly earlier than agricul-

ture. The latter, however, could not considerably lag behind the reconstruction processes in other branches of national economy. Whereas in capitalist countries the development of capitalist industry intensifies the contradictions between town and country, under conditions of proletarian dictatorship one of the main tasks of the régime is to do away with the opposed position of industry and agriculture. This task cannot leave the proletariat indifferent to the lines of development of agriculture. To the capitalist form of development of agriculture, to capitalism, which has produced millions of small peasant farms, the proletariat counterposes a different way—that of Socialist development. The Fifteenth Party Congress, having in view the considerable successes of Soviet industry, which has passed the pre-war level, and the progress of agricultural machine-production in particular, alluded in its findings to the necessity of a more active construction of the Socialist section of agriculture, *i.e.*, the Soviet Estates and Collective Farms.

These slogans of the Fifteenth Congress met with a friendly response in the countryside itself. The attention paid by party organisations to the construction of collective farms encountered a corresponding wave of activity on the part of the poor and middle peasants in this constructional work. It goes without saying that the proletarian state plays a leading rôle in this collectivisation of agriculture.

The leading rôle of the proletarian state in the socialistic transformation of agriculture is seen plainly in the varied and complicated methods of planned economy. In the main, this rôle is defined by the following factors:

1. *The planned system of economy*, regulation of the market, manœuvring with the commodity mass—these things make it possible to influence rural economy and co-ordinate the development of agriculture with the interests of national economy as a whole.

2. *Socialist Industry*, producing the means of agricultural production, is a decisive propellant of agriculture. This factor determines the tempo of development of the various branches of farming and the introduction of advanced methods of production, improved cultivation, application of artificial manures, building of refrigerators, granaries and so on.

3. *The building up of a State Budget*, of a banking and credit system, the redistribution of parts of the national income, and the manœuvring of credit resources determine the structure of the rural money-market, the character of agricultural finance and the trend of expenditure in rural economy.

4. *Limitation of the development of rural capitalism*, liberation of the dependent sections of the countryside from the usury of the wealthy peasants, the legal, fiscal and other State measures, have a very strong influence on the nature of social relations in the countryside.

Such are the “commanding heights” which enable the Proletarian State to influence the process of development of agriculture.

It should be added that the nationalisation of the land relieved agriculture of the burden of outlay for the purchase or rental of land, releasing funds for increasing the means of production. For the State, this means devoting a part of the population’s resources to the work of economic development.

The production of agricultural machinery inside the Soviet Union exceeds pre-war by two-and-a-half times; the construction of tractors and the production of mineral manures, etc., has now started. The plans of work for the next five years envisage, however, a further very considerable extension of industrial production for agricultural purposes. Thus, two new tractor factories will produce by the end of the five years 100,000 tractors per year; the production of agricultural machines will be five times more than in 1928, while the number of mineral manures manufactured in the country will be still further increased. There is also planned a most extensive system of creameries, poultry farms, bacon curing factories, refrigerators, granaries, etc.

Thus the Socialist industry of the U.S.S.R. is energetically at work and has already achieved big successes in the way of supplying agriculture with implements and means of production such as will be able to bring it up to the standard of all demands of modern agricultural technique and create the basis for its socialisation.

During the two years that have elapsed since the Fifteenth Congress, the number of collective farms has increased almost fourfold. The

population and area sown in these farms has grown still more. On May 1st, 1929, there were altogether 50,000 collective farms in the U.S.S.R. They were peopled by 900,000 families with a total population of 4,000,000 and an area of more than 4,400,000 hectares under cultivation. In 1927 there were 13,500 collective farms with 164,000 families and 774,000 hectares area sown.

The most rapid construction of collective farms has taken place in the districts producing marketable grain where, at the same time, there is class differentiation to a greater degree than in other districts. Thus, in the Ural region the cultivated area of the collective farms was 30,300 hectares in 1927, 80,600 hectares in 1928, and 335,500 hectares in 1929. In the Lower Volga region the cultivated area of collective farms was 67,000 hectares in 1927, 98,900 hectares in 1928, and 405,900 hectares in 1929. In Siberia for the same years the figures are 55,900, 150,000 and 593,200 hectares respectively.

The tremendous scale on which collective farm construction has developed bears witness to the large and rapidly-growing numbers of revolutionary peasants who are breaking forth from the framework of their social "surroundings, from the framework of a small plot of land." (Marx, *18th Brumaire*.)

The vital force of collective farm construction—this "trial of practical activity in the sphere of Socialist construction in the countryside" (Lenin)—is shown by the way the peasants trust the collective farms with their land. Everyone knows how firmly the peasant holds on to his little piece of land. Yet only 2.6 per cent. of the societies which came into being in 1928 were formed on land not leased out by the peasants. There is a still more convincing fact as to the soundness of collective farm construction. The new farm usually adopts statutes most closely resembling the basis of the original collective farms (commune, artel, society for joint land cultivation).

The life of the collective farm, however, considerably changes the form of these relations. Therefore, it often happens that the actual relations in the collective farms are different from what they ought to be according to the statutes. But if the development of the collective farm were to proceed backwards, *i.e.*, from

the offshoots of socialised production towards desocialisation, it would have to be admitted that the construction of collective farms does not help the collectivist transformation of small peasant farms.

There undoubtedly exists a tendency attempting to utilise the collective farms for individual accumulation. This is shown by the fact that funds assigned to a collective farm frequently leak into that part of the members' individual farms which remains unsocialised. Here the contradictions of collective farm construction by petty proprietors make themselves shown. But a more characteristic leading factor in the collective farm movement is the actual changing of various collective farms towards large-scale socialisation.

In going over to collective production the small peasant farm changes its nature in two ways: (a) the transition from small-scale to large-scale production, and (b) from petty proprietary to collective ownership and cultivation. This break with the customary basis and methods of production of the small producer does not take place under pressure of the inexorable laws whereby capitalism eats up the small farm, but under the pressure of the "economic way" (Marx),—*i.e.*, the more advanced and progressive methods of farming as demonstrated by the proletariat.

What have we to show is that these collective farms are an advanced and progressive form of agriculture as compared with present farming?

In the first place it should be noticed that the large majority of the collective farms have an elaborate agricultural inventory in the shape of the necessary equipment for farming on a larger scale. A large number of collective farms own tractors, although their number is still considerably below the demand.

The majority of collective farms are using assorted seeds, the use of the latter in the R.S.F.S.R. being as follows: In communes 89.7 per cent., artels 77.6 per cent., and in societies 66.8 per cent. In the Ukraine, assorted seeds are utilised by all the communes, 88.9 per cent. of the artels, and 24.9 per cent. of the societies.

The collective farms have also abandoned the three-field system—the bane of agriculture in Russia. The multi-field system of crop

rotation is now prevalent in the majority of collective farms (86.3 per cent. of the communes, 48.1 per cent. of the artels, and 41.7 per cent. of the societies).

The delay in the survey and distribution of the land has held up the application of the multi-field system on many of the collective farms. The steps taken, however, by the People's Commissariat for Agriculture, for the rapid allocation of the collective farm lands will also increase the percentage of farms having multi-field crop rotation.

Taking advantage of the pre-eminence of large-scale farming, the collective farms are increasing the more marketable cultures among their various crops. For example, in the Western district seed grasses occupy only 4 per cent. in the lower groups of the peasant farms, and 17 per cent. in the higher groups of peasant farms. Even in the most simple form of collective farming, *i.e.*, the societies, grasses occupy a bigger place than in the higher group of peasant farms. In the latter, grasses occupy 20 per cent., while in the communes they constitute as much as 28 per cent. of the area sown. In the Central black-soil district, sunflower seed comprises 5.5 per cent. of the area sown in peasant farms and 10 per cent. in collective farms; sugar beet 0.6 per cent. on individual farms, and 1.5 per cent. on collective farms. We find the same correlation in other districts of the Soviet Union. The better supply of equipment and superior organisation of farming bring better harvests in the collective farms; in the Central black-soil region the yield of winter wheat was 9 centners per hectare from the peasant farms and 12 from the collective farms. In the Ukraine, the corresponding ratios were 10 and 13, and in the Northern Caucasus, 5 and 6 respectively.

From this cursory survey of the productive successes of collective farms, we have ample grounds for concluding that the poor and middle-peasant enterprises which go to make up the collective farms, in uniting into this latter form, create a type of farming which, by its technical level and its productivity excels not only the individual poor- and middle-peasant farms, but even the most advanced peasant undertakings. During the present year, in addition to a further increase in the

number of collective farms, there has been a considerable movement towards their general strengthening. The great growth of collective farming during the past year, was to a considerable extent due to the formation of small collective farms which even caused a diminution of the average acreage of collective farms. In the current year, however, there has been an intensive spreading of the system of uniting groups of collective farms out of which "giant" farms have sprung up. Entire districts (Elansk, in the Urals, Volovsk, in the Tula region, the Digorsky Kombinat in the Caucasus, etc.), are experimenting in the construction of these "giant" collective farms, erected on the basis of out-and-out collectivism. These movements towards large-scale collective farm construction are decisive, for only under this condition will the collective farms be able to progress further forward, both in respect to the productivity of their labour and the cultural and social service of their members.

The reconstruction of agriculture in the U.S.S.R. is still only in the first stages of a gigantic process which is to bridge the gulf between industry and agriculture and lead to the liquidation of classes in the U.S.S.R. It is quite natural that in attaching such tremendous importance to collective farms and Soviet estates in this reconstruction of the Soviet countryside, the party and Soviet Government are making great efforts for the extension and strengthening of these farms to the maximum degree. It should be observed, however, that up to now the collective sector still occupies but a small place in the total production of Soviet agriculture. In 1929, the collective farms contributed 4 per cent. of the area sown, 4.5 per cent. of the total production and 6 per cent. of the marketable production. The five-year plan of economic construction in the U.S.S.R. includes the great object of raising to a large degree the importance of the collective farms in relation to the total agricultural output. By the end of the five years the portion of basic capital owned by the collective farms will increase to 15.9 per cent., marketable production will reach 16.7 per cent., while the total of peasant farms combined will increase from 400,000 to 5,000,000.

This growth of the collective farms along with the growing Soviet estates, gives added importance to the rôle of socialised agriculture in leading and guiding the transformation of the remaining peasant masses. In overcoming the difficulties confronting collective farm construction, the poor- and middle-peasants, under the guidance of the proletariat, will widely extend the new form of Socialist transformation of the backward countryside.

The October Revolution radically changed the nature of social relations in the countryside. It completely abolished the landowners' estates, and led to the redistribution of part of the lands of the wealthy peasants which were taken over by the village poor. At the same time there took place a redistribution of the means of production belonging to the capitalist elements, these being utilised by the middle and poor peasants. The results of the agrarian revolution was that the rôle of the wealthy peasantry was greatly weakened, while sections of the poor peasants went over to the middle peasant group. The middle peasant became stronger as the "central" figure in agriculture.

The new economic policy, however, bringing as it did commodity and money-circulation, market relations and the possibilities of accumulation arising therefrom, opened out for the wealthy peasantry (Kulaks) certain opportunities of capitalist development. The wealthy peasantry by accumulating the means of production and hiring it out to the poor peasants and by leasing land to poor peasants not having equipment, or by hiring their labour-power, endeavours to make the lower sections of the countryside dependent on them.

The development of collective farms is a decisive blow at the exploiting aims of the rich peasantry. The collective farms are overcoming the lack of equipment, which forms the main basis for the development of the rich peasant. The peasantry, by getting its own land, by jointly utilising both its own equipment and that received from State credit, by uniting into collective farms—is becoming completely liberated from dependency upon the Kulaks. Roots that have fed exploitation for centuries are being stamped out by collective farming. The Kulak is not allowed to lease out land; to hire labour for a mere song;

to hire out equipment; or to practise usury. Co-operative credit, hiring-stations, tractor columns, together with the correct organisation of large-scale farming on scientific lines—these things are steadily undermining the wealthy peasantry.

At the same time by organising into collective farms, the poor and middle peasantry are helped to struggle against exploitation. The influence and power of the Kulak, which had been strengthened for many decades is now shaking and crumbling. The possibility of getting on without the "services" of the Kulak, and of advancing agriculture with their own forces and government support, is spurring on the lower strata of the countryside, and strengthening their consciousness.

The high productivity of the collective farms, which yield harvests exceeding individual farming by 20-30 per cent., is undermining the authority of the rich peasant as a farmer, and demonstrates by facts what tremendous possibilities there are in large-scale collective production for advancing agriculture in general.

All this, of course, has aroused great hatred against the collective farms on the part of the Kulaks. The more profound the work of placing agriculture on a collective basis and the more decisive the advance of Socialism in the countryside, so much the more stubborn and intense is the resistance of the rich peasantry. Realising that collectivism destroys the opportunity of capitalist accumulation, the Kulaks are using all their influence on the peasant farms depending on them, in order to hinder the organisation of collective farms; they are applying the most varied forms of intimidation, employing slander and the spreading of false rumours and even going as far as setting fire to collective farm buildings and murdering the farm directors. Cases are known where the Kulaks have hired beggars with a view to the latter presenting themselves as disappointed members of collective farms and creating the impression of a poverty-stricken standard of living in the collective farms. Rumours are spread concerning the nationalisation of women in the collective farms, systematic robbery, etc. The strongest argument used in respect of the middle peasants is that when they join the collective farms

they lose all their inventory and everything else goes to the State, while destitution awaits the peasants. Finally, those peasants who are active social workers are absolutely terrorised. They are threatened with murder or incendiarism—frequently carried out—and often corrupted by drink or money.

In view of this intensified class struggle in the Soviet countryside, it is of the utmost importance to develop the initiative and activity of the poor-peasant sections and strengthen their connections with the middle peasants. The most important object of Soviet rural policy is to isolate the rich peasantry, paralyse their influence over the middle peasantry and to draw the latter into the work of Socialist construction. By taking the poor peasantry as a firm basis, by increasing their class-consciousness, their social and economic activity, and maintaining the closest contact with the middle-peasant masses, the Communist Party has brought into being a tremendous social movement in the country—a cultural and economic advancement among the peasantry that has found its expression in the construction of collective farms. The day-to-day work of the collective farms is disclosing such persistence in the overcoming of difficulties and such social initiative on the part of the collective farm population as to show already that they are beginning to outlive the centuries-old narrowness and torpor of the peasant. The building of schools, clubs and hospitals, the sending of the children to Workers' Faculties and Universities, the collection of funds for

these purposes, organised leadership in the respective fields of work—all these things are bringing about tremendous changes in the psychology of the peasantry. The collective farms are a cultural and social centre. The club, the village reading-room, the agronomical consulting station, the schools, the lying-in hospitals—all take the place of the "traktir" (inn) and the church, where the Kulak and the priest once reigned. The economic services rendered to the non-collectivised population by the bigger collective farms makes the latter into starting points for the economic elevation of the poor and middle peasants and for the advance against capitalist elements in the countryside. (Such services include stations for the hire of machinery, seed-sorting and breeding stations, while the superior cultivation of the land and bigger harvests also represent propaganda in fact.)

It is quite clear that given such class relations, any wavering in the attack on the rural capitalist elements, any deviation from a clear-cut class line represents a weakening in the position of the working class in the countryside. The decisive repression of the Right deviation is an essential prerequisite for the collectivisation of rural economy. A conciliatory attitude towards Right-wing vacillations would act as a brake on the Socialist transformation of the countryside. A decisive struggle against these errors is therefore necessary for the development of Socialist construction in the U.S.S.R.