

RUSSIAN PEASANT ORGANISATION BEFORE COLLECTIVISATION:  
A STUDY OF COMMUNE AND GATHERING, 1925–1930. By *D. J. Male*.  
Soviet and East European Studies. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge  
University Press, 1971. viii, 253 pp. \$12.50.

It is commonly ignored that the traditional Russian repartitional village commune organization, decadent and under attack before the Revolution, not only survived it but became stronger and more equalitarian. With admirable industry, making the best of sketchy and unreliable data, Male has looked through the veil which the Bolsheviks pulled over this aspect of Soviet life and has drawn a picture of the village commune and its activities and relations to the Soviet state—a lamentably incomplete picture but far better than any previous one.

Apparently a large majority of agricultural land in the mid 1920s was subject to equalizing redistribution, and the peasants largely handled their own affairs, as in the past, through the village assembly of heads of households. They seem to have paid much more heed to the communal than to the local soviet organization, which was an instrument of alien power. For this reason the Bolsheviks began to attack the commune in the late 1920s and then destroyed it in the collectivization campaign.

There is little evidence of extensive economic differentiation in the village; it would seem that the great Soviet emphasis on class conflicts between rich, middle, and poor peasants was little more than an attempt to divide and weaken the peasant masses. A “kulak” was simply a peasant who had accumulated a little more capital than his neighbors, and a poor year could make a “kulak” into an ordinary peasant. In collectivization the term was used simply to mean “oppositionist.”

Soviet authorities faulted the commune for its uneconomic division of the land, but under it the Russian peasantry reached a prosperity not to be recovered for a generation. It may be surmised that an important reason for collectivization was to replace the independent peasant organization with the centrally controlled kolkhoz. It may also be that the commune facilitated collectivization by its very equalitarianism, preventing the rise of an independent rural class (such as Stolypin hoped to foster) in a position to lead a political battle for peasant rights. Male’s study should contribute to an understanding of the still somewhat mysterious Stalinist “transformation of the countryside.”

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STALIN, HITLER, AND EUROPE. Vol. 2: THE IMBALANCE OF POWER,  
1939–1941. By *James E. McSherry*. Cleveland and New York: World, 1970.  
viii, 357 pp. \$12.50.

The first volume of this set, entitled *Stalin, Hitler, and Europe: The Origins of World War II, 1933–1939*, was reviewed in this journal (December 1968, p. 660). Though it covers somewhat less familiar ground, the second volume is very similar, and little needs to be added to the earlier comments. The author unfortunately has not used the most important recent work on his subject, Andreas Hillgruber’s *Hitlers Strategie: Politik und Kriegführung, 1940–1941* (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard and Graefe, 1965). A good index for both volumes is to be found in this one. Together the two books can be used as an introduction to the diplomacy of the years 1938–41.

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