

ALAN ABOUCHAR

The Private Plot and the Prototype Collective Farm Charter

In a recent paper Alec Nove expressed the view that the prototype collective farm statute adopted at the November 1969 kolkhoz congress contained little new except the procedures for electing kolkhoz councils and that it was essentially a ratification of measures already taken.¹ This view overlooks the important changes in respect to private plot agriculture which, if they had been implemented, might have had startling effects on agricultural labor allocation, output mix, and probably total agricultural output. As it turns out, the new private plot regulations, after being ratified in a resolution of the CPSU Central Committee over the signatures of Brezhnev and Kosygin in November 1969, appear to have been excised from the prototype charter as adopted by the lower-level Third All-Union Congress of Collective Farm Workers as reported in September 1970.² The new regulations also did ratify some tendencies in wage reform, which were considerably weakened later.

The November regulations were to permit larger livestock holdings than are currently held by the peasants. The regulations did not spell out the differences between the new norms and present reality, and unfortunately the usual statistical yearbooks do not give this data, restricting themselves rather to total private holdings, including those of both state and collective farm subsidiary plots, and others as well.

The 1960 agricultural handbook does provide detailed information on livestock holdings which enables us to calculate average private plot stock holdings for collective farms. The following table compares these with the limits permitted by the new November 1969 collective farm charter. Evidently the November charter permitted large increases in all stock holdings—the increases ranging from 59 percent for cows to 625 percent for sheep and goats. The 0.50 hectare landholding permitted under the regulations is 57 percent larger than the present average subsidiary plot; when the subsidiary plot is

1. Alec Nove, "Soviet Agriculture Under Brezhnev," *Slavic Review*, 29, no. 3 (September 1970): 393.

2. "Postanovlenie TsK KPSS Soveta Ministrov SSSR ot 28 noiabria 1969 goda o Primernom Ustave Kolkhoza," *Pravda*, Nov. 30, 1969; *Ekonomicheskaja gazeta*, 1970, no. 36, p. 13.

The substance of this note was first presented as part of a discussion paper at the McMaster University Conference on Current Problems of the Socialist Economies.

Present Livestock and Landholdings on Kolkhoz Private Plots and Holdings Permitted Under the November Charter

	Held Under Present Rules	Permitted Under November Charter	New/Old (percent)
All cattle	0.94	2 ^a	213
Cows	0.63	1	159
Swine	0.54	2	370
Sheep and goats	1.38	10	725
	Average All Holdings	Unirrigated	Irrigated
Land (hectares) 1968	0.32	0.50	0.20

Sources: Present average holdings calculated from data in *Sel'skoe khoziaistvo SSSR* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 52, 266–69; average 1968 land area from *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1968 g.* (Moscow, 1969), pp. 330, 423; new holdings under November charter from *Pravda*, Nov. 30, 1969.

^a In addition, new calves may be retained up to one year.

irrigated, 0.20 hectare is permitted, which is 38 percent smaller than the present overall average for all kolkhoz subsidiary plots.

These provisions represented a continuation of the liberal Brezhnev-Kosygin private plot policy. To appreciate their significance, let us recall the importance of private plot agriculture and its history during the Khrushchev years. These plots are the last important vestige of private activity in the Soviet Union and have long represented an attractive alternative for the peasant's time and effort. Comprising some 3 percent of arable land, the private sector accounted for between 22 and 66 percent of the production of six of the nine leading agricultural products by the mid-sixties (the figures for 1958 were: potatoes, 66 percent; vegetables, 45 percent; meat, 52 percent; milk, 53 percent; eggs, 85 percent; wool, 22 percent).³

Under Khrushchev private agriculture was repressed and private plot arable land fell by 18 percent between 1958 and 1964. The policy of the Khrushchev years has been surveyed by others and need not be repeated here.⁴ But even under Khrushchev, labor input on private plots rose persistently. Although comparisons with the communal sector are a little difficult because many kolkhozes were being reorganized into sovkhoses, it is notable that the private plot labor input on kolkhozes rose by 22 percent between 1958 and 1965 while the communal input fell by 23 percent.⁵

Brezhnev and Kosygin came on the scene after a seven-year record of

3. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1965 g.* (Moscow, 1966), p. 265.

4. See John W. De Pauw, "The Private Sector in Soviet Agriculture," *Slavic Review*, 28, no. 1 (March 1969), and C. A. Knox Lovell, "The Role of the Private Subsidiary Farming During the Soviet Seven-Year Plan, 1959–65," *Soviet Studies*, 20, no. 1 (July 1968).

5. Jerzy Karcz, "Seven Years on the Farm: Retrospect and Prospect," in *New Directions in the Soviet Economy*, part II-B (Washington, D.C., 1966), p. 391.

2 percent average annual growth,⁶ a performance appearing the more dismal when compared with industry's 10 percent average annual growth, and also considering the very good harvests of 1957 and 1958, which showed gains of about 10 percent each. They quickly set out to redress the damage by dropping some of Khrushchev's specific crop policies, instituting a series of organizational reforms, modifying the pattern of investment, allocating more materials inputs, de-emphasizing large scale, revising price and quota policy, and, finally, instituting a system of fixed wage rates for collective farms.⁷

The Brezhnev-Kosygin team also took a new approach to private plot farming. Thus the decline of private plot production shares since 1958 was arrested and private plot production stabilized as a share of total.⁸ The introduction of the new regulations in the November charter was a continuation of this liberalization. The leadership had second thoughts on the matter, however, which convinced them that this further liberalization of private agriculture would have untoward effects, and subsequently the September 1970 Third All-Union Congress of Collective Farm Workers adopted a prototype charter which makes no mention of stockholdings or land allotments at all. Section 7, dealing with private plots, reiterates the right to a plot and states somewhat more liberal conditions for provision of tractive power, and so forth, to the farmers than did the November charter, but it says nothing about size of holdings—leaving one to infer that things will remain much as they have been in the past.

The retrenchment in the private plot sector between the November charter and the September charter was accompanied by a major rewording of pay regulations. The November charter had stated (sec. 6:28) that "the kolkhoz establishes a guaranteed wage for the communal work of the kolkhozniks." Coming as it does after an earlier reference (sec. 6:27) to wage rates for quality of work, hours of work, and "other systems of labor payments," this suggests that an eventual move to some sort of guaranteed annual wage was in the offing.⁹ Definite piece rates would be established for all jobs, codifying the trend which had been initiated in 1966 in the form of the principal collective farm document. But the September charter contains no details of compensation at all.¹⁰ It does, however, contain provisions allowing for detailed regulations concerning workdays, workweek, and vacation. And by implication many farms may still be on something like a *trudoden'* system, since the actual amount

6. Nancy Nimitz, "Agriculture Under Khrushchev: The Lean Years," *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1965, pp. 12, 21.

7. These reforms were discussed by Roger Clarke in "Soviet Agricultural Reforms Since Khrushchev," *Soviet Studies*, 20, no. 2 (October 1968).

8. *Nar. khoz.*, 1963, p. 230, and *Nar. khoz.*, 1968, p. 321.

9. This would have been a change from the present guarantee, which, as Clarke has emphasized, is a guarantee for performance of individual tasks in distinction to the *trudoden'* system ("Soviet Agricultural Reforms Since Khrushchev," p. 162).

10. *Pravda*, Nov. 30, 1969.

to be assigned to each day's vacation credit is to be determined at a plenary meeting of the farmers.¹¹

The wage provision in the November charter *was* an example of ratifying measures already taken, since it codified the notion of some kind of wage fixity. Why all references to fixed wages were dropped from the September charter is a mystery, which was not at all clarified by First Deputy Minister Volovchenko's interview in the following issue of *Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta* (1970, no. 37). The failure to provide any information on wages in September apart from vacation information is the more perplexing when contrasted with the "Regulation on Wages for Workers in State Farms and Other State Enterprises in Agriculture" adopted by the Council of Ministers State Committee on Labor and Wages and the party Central Committee in July. This contains detailed regulations on wage premia for various skills and jobs of the workers affected—agricultural workers *other* than those on collective farms. Moreover, these workers are always carefully, even if clumsily, defined to exclude collective farm workers ("workers on state farms and other state enterprises in agriculture engaged in agricultural and husbandry operations"),¹² so that there can be no mistaking the intent of these particular regulations. One conjecture for the de-emphasis of fixed wages for collective farmers is that since their wages appeared to have been growing fastest in the recent past (according to Nove, kolkhoz incomes rose by 100 percent as compared with industrial wages and by 50 percent as compared with state farm incomes between 1960 and 1968),¹³ it was decided to relax any measures designed to improve their position still further in the near future.

We note in conclusion that the November moves were a consistent part of a generally more liberal agricultural policy: granting fixed wages (even though these had to do with piecework rather than time periods) would stem one of the main previous incentives toward private plot activity; but permitting increases in private plots would encourage production among those who believed themselves to be even more productive on their own plots, and it might encourage a generally more rational allocation of labor by each individual farmer. Finally, the projected increases in agricultural capital inputs during the 1971–75 Five-Year Plan would presumably free some labor for the more labor-intensive pursuits of truck farming, husbandry, and dairying, which are traditionally the greater concern of the private plot sector.¹⁴ Thus it will be

11. *Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta*, 1970, no. 36, p. 13.

12. *Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta*, 1970, no. 30, pp. 11–14.

13. Nove, "Soviet Agriculture Under Brezhnev," p. 399.

14. Brezhnev's speech before the Central Committee in July 1970 envisaged for the 1971–75 period an increase of 20 percent in the average provision of tractors compared with 1965–67 (340,000 versus 285,000 annually), an annual increase of 100 percent in truck supply, and an increase in combines equal to the present stock. See *Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta*, 1970, no. 28, p. 146, and *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR*, various years.

interesting to see whether the greater attention projected for agriculture in the area of inputs dissipates in the near future and with it the hopes expressed by Brezhnev for increases in annual output ranging from 20 to 72 percent between 1968 and 1975 for poultry, milk, eggs, and wool, and substantial increases in most other important agricultural products besides.

Note on Mr. Abouchar's Note

It is very much to the good that Mr. Abouchar has drawn attention to the fact that fairly liberal-looking provisions on the private plot seem to have been omitted from the model charter, which was adopted by the All-Union Congress of Collective Farmers. This omission must have some significance, and I ought to have referred to it in my article, but the article was already printed when the congress was held. However, my interpretation of the statistics and of the significance of the omission is quite different from Abouchar's. I read the figures in the original draft as being maxima. The actual figures in particular areas and farms were generally—and were always intended to be—lower than those maxima. It is in fact up to the management of the given collective farm, with or without the participation of the local authorities, to determine what the peasant families in the particular farm or district are allowed to have. Furthermore in some farms which I visited myself we were told that the size of a given family's plot may be dependent upon the size of the family and on the degree of its participation in collective work.

Consequently Abouchar's table is totally misleading. The draft charter certainly never intended to increase either the actual numbers or local maxima of private cattle and other animals by the percentage there given. The same is true of the area of collective land. The depth of Abouchar's misunderstanding is most easily seen with the example of cows. The usual maximum is one cow per household. This was not altered by the draft charter. Yet according to him there was to be an increase of 59 percent, which is another way of saying that quite a large number of peasant families at the moment do not have a cow. But surely to restate a right which already exists—and which some, for a variety of reasons, choose not to exercise—cannot be described as a change of policy. Nor can I really believe that the leadership intended to increase the average size of plots. In this and in other respects they were, in my opinion, trying to formalize current practice. In some areas the size of private plots was 0.50 hectare, though the overall average was lower.

It may be asked: if this interpretation is correct, what explanation can be advanced for the exclusion of these specified maxima from the final version of the charter? I would suggest the following answer. Precisely because the figures given were a reflection of the maximum in some areas or some farms only, their

enactment in a formal document could have been held to provide an undesirable means of pressure that could be exerted by peasants who were below this maximum. It would be inconvenient if a peasant with 0.25 hectare and one hog could point to a recently adopted document and demand more land and another hog. It seemed simpler to keep quiet about it. Or to put it another way, it is possible that some Soviet peasants would make the same calculations as those made by Mr. Abouchar and might be equally misled.

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Rejoinder to Professor Nove

Since the November 1969 charter did indeed specify maxima (which is, of course, what "permitted" means!) which were a good deal higher than present holdings, what have we besides Professor Nove's authority on which to accept his *ex cathedra* pronouncement that the draft charter "never intended to increase either the actual numbers or local maxima"? Perhaps, like Professor Nove's peasant, I am innocent of the metaphysical subtleties of the comparison that Professor Nove would make, but my unregenerate intuition continues to tell me that two head of cattle are, in some sense, more than one, and that ten sheep and goats are over seven times as much as the average farmer now has on his plot. If I were a farm manager and could do sophisticated calculations as well, I would conclude that the land norms given in the charter probably were close to present reality, with the overall average of 0.32 hectare probably a good approximation to a weighted average of the two types. Then I would reason that since a set of norms is being newly published, with animal holdings far exceeding and land norms approximately equal to present holdings, the government did have in mind something like a new policy. After all, if it had just wanted to license existing average practice, it could have gotten much closer on the animal norms. And if the norms were simply a statement of existing maxima, why should the animal average-maximum differentials be so great (up to 625 percent) and the land average-maximum differential (for each type separately) practically zero? The codification of wage rates and the reference to a guaranteed kolkhoz wage would support the interpretation of liberalization. At least it would have done so in November 1969, when the first charter was published, before one had the benefit of Professor Nove's study in late 1970 to disabuse him of such simplistic interpretations and assure him that the charter contained no novelties. Professor Nove appears to have access to the details of the thinking of those on the official ladder who are higher up than the farm manager. How sad that he did not choose to share them with those of us who do not have such good connections.

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