

Excerpts Describe Excesses of Farm Collectivization

Following are reminiscences attributed by *Life* magazine to Nikita S. Khrushchev concerning the excesses of Stalin's collectivization of agriculture in 1930.

Collectivization was begun the year before I was transferred from the Ukraine, but it wasn't until after I started work in Moscow that I began to suspect its real effects on the rural population—and it wasn't until many years later that I realized the scale of the starvation and repression which accompanied collectivization as it was carried out under Stalin.

My first glimpse of the truth was in 1930, when the Party cell at the Industrial Academy tried to get rid of me by sending me out into the country on a business trip. The Academy sponsored the Stalin Collective Farm in the Samara Region, to which I was supposed to deliver money which we had collected for the purchase of agricultural implements.

We spent only a few days at the collective farm and were appalled at the conditions there. The farmers were starving to death. We

called a meeting to present the money which we'd brought them. Most of the workers on this collective farm were drawn from the Chuvash population, so we had to speak to them through a translator. When we told them that the money was allocated for farm equipment, they told us they weren't interested in equipment—what they wanted was bread. They literally begged us to give them food.

I'd had no idea that things were this bad. We'd been living under the illusion promoted by Pravda that collectivization was proceeding smoothly and everything was fine in the countryside.

Then, without warning, Stalin delivered his famous speech laying the blame for the excesses of the collectivization on active local Party members. I remember being bothered by the thought: if everything has been going as well on the collective farms as Stalin has been telling us, what's the reason for the speech?

One of my friends told me that there were strikes going on in the Ukraine, and that

Red Army soldiers had to be mobilized to weed the sugar beet crop. I was horrified. You couldn't expect Red Army soldiers, most of whom had never seen a sugar beet and didn't give a damn if they ever saw one again, to do the job right. Naturally the sugar beet crop was lost. Subsequently the word got around that famine had broken out in the Ukraine. I couldn't believe it. I'd left the Ukraine in 1929, when food had been plentiful and cheap.

Years later (Anastas) Mikoyan told me that Comrade Demchenko, who was then First Secretary of the Kiev Regional Committee, came to see him in Moscow. Here's what Demchenko said: "Anastas Ivanovich, does Comrade Stalin—for the matter, does anyone in the Politburo—know what's happening in the Ukraine? A train recently pulled into Kiev loaded with corpses of people who had starved to death. It had picked up corpses all the way from Poltava to Kiev. I think somebody had better inform Stalin about this situation."

You can see that an abnormal state of affairs had de-

veloped when someone like Demchenko, a member of the Ukrainian Politburo, was afraid to go see Stalin himself. We had already moved into the period when one man had the collective (leadership) under his thumb and everyone else trembled before him.

When the failure of the collectivization became widely known, we were all taught to blame scheming kulaks, rightists, Trotskyites and Zinovites for what was happening. There was always the handy explanation of counter-revolutionary sabotage.

Perhaps we'll never know how many people perished directly as a result of collectivization or indirectly, as a result of Stalin's eagerness to blame its failure on others. But two things are certain: first, the Stalin brand of collectivization brought us nothing but misery and brutality; and second Stalin played the decisive role in the leadership of our country at the time. If we were looking for someone to hold responsible, we could lay the blame squarely on Stalin's own shoulders.

But all this is hindsight. We still trusted and believed in Stalin.

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