

CHAPTER V

The Policy of Collectivisation

Circular of June 3rd, 1928—Reorganisation of Economic Control—More foreign experts called in—The Five Years' Plan inaugurated—Enforced collectivisation of the poorer peasants—Stalinist control of the Trade Union Council the reason—The tempo slowed down temporarily but resumed—Types of collective farms—The *Artel* described—The allotted task again—Wages dependent on its fulfilment.

WHILE the system of compulsory labour for sentenced persons was being extended as described in the last chapter, other important developments were taking place. From April 1928 onwards the execution of the year's plan had become more uncertain than had been hoped. Output, which had been well maintained during the previous six months, had slipped back, especially in basic industries such as coal and steel. Publications of the Labour and Defence Council and of the Supreme Economic Council alleged that the chief cause lay in the absenteeism of workers, due chiefly to increased consumption of alcohol. The technical staffs, it was said, had been placed in a difficult position by recent prosecutions, and had insufficient authority. Trade unions were openly accused of putting difficulties in their way. The trade unions

retorted that many of the industrial workers were from the country and new to factory or mining conditions, and that neglect of labour protection and frequent changes of programme did not give output a chance.¹

The position therefore called for action, and Stalin had a clearer field before him, as Trotsky, his chief opponent, had been sent into exile early in the year. In April the Political Bureau decided on a policy of considerably extending and adding to State farms, and trusts were created for the purpose. The policy met with some opposition, but was endorsed by the Central Committee of the Party in a strongly worded circular of June 3rd, in which they declared as their principal task the development of industry in order to build up the Socialist State, and denounced the 'obstinate resistance' to this policy which was being offered alike by the *kulaki*, by 'certain classes of technical experts, by bureaucrats, and by trade unions.' Members of the Communist Party within the trade union movement were therefore urged to hold new elections in order to remove from positions of authority 'bureaucrats who had lost touch with the masses, and no longer understood their needs'—a reference, among others, to Tomsy, President of the Central Council.²

¹ *Industrial and Labour Information*, September 24th, 1928, pp. 337 *et seq.*

² *Industrial and Labour Information*, July 16th, 1928, p. 62, quoting from the 'Soviet Press.' Mr. Baikaloff, in his book *The Land of Communist Dictatorship*, reproduces a table showing the percentage of Communists among the office-bearers and committees of trade unions on January 1st, 1927, and May 1st, 1928, respectively. The percentage on both dates was very high, ranging from over 50 per cent. on the committees of local branches to 100 per cent. of the office-bearers of the All-Russian Central Council (pp. 210-1).

The last part of this declaration did not bear fruit until a year later. The effect of the first was at once seen in the adoption of a far-reaching and vigorous policy.

In July the Fifth Congress of Soviets of the R.S.F.S.R. reaffirmed the article of the constitution which recognised labour as the duty of all citizens of the Republic, and added to it the important declaration that 'no citizen of the Republic may refrain from labour.'

Meanwhile much reorganisation was afoot. At a meeting of the Central Committee held late in August it was reported that all industry had been placed under the Supreme Economic Council, and that the Council had called for a technical council to be set up in every undertaking. The work of these was to be directly supervised by the supreme body. The Council itself was to be assisted by a board of some fifty experts, of whom one-third were to be foreign engineers and scientists whose duty it would be to advise on questions of rationalisation and industrial reconstruction. A wider appeal was to be made to foreign engineers, and Russia's lack of capital was emphasised.

That the Central Committee was the power behind the throne was shown by the resolutions passed. Soviet Russia's Supreme Council was 'instructed' to inquire into the bad working of certain undertakings and to work out plans for improvements in housing; baths and workers' clubs during the next five years. The Commissariat of Labour was 'directed' to study the training of skilled workers,

and trade unions were invited to ensure good management and discipline.

Finally it was announced that the carrying out of these decisions would be supervised by the Committee itself.¹

The Annual Planning of the previous years thus gave place to a Five Years' Plan, to be largely directed by foreign skill, financed, where possible, by foreign capital, and directed throughout by the Central Committee. The Plan was to date from October 1st, 1928.

A fundamental part of the scheme was increased agricultural production. This it was proposed chiefly to secure by the extension of large State farms and by the 'collectivisation' of the peasants, whose primitive methods of farming would be replaced by agricultural machinery, credits and seed to be provided by the Government. But in view of the feeling aroused by the exactions of the previous winter, it was decreed that future sales of grain should be voluntary, and that better prices should be given.

The harvest of 1928 showed a serious decline in cereal production as compared with the pre-war period, though the population was considerably greater² and was increasing by three and a half millions annually. Not only acreage, but yield per acre, had declined.³ The lack of incentive to good farming caused by the Government's exactions

¹ *Industrial and Labour Information*, November 19th, 1928.

² i.e. allowing for the loss of Poland and other States.

³ W. H. Chamberlin, *Soviet Russia*, 1930, p. 197, and Birmingham University Memorandum, p. 4.

had done its work. This was courageously pointed out by Rykov, then Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, who protested in particular against the excessive taxation of the *kulaks*.¹ But Stalin had emphasised the danger to Socialist ideals involved in the continuance of a peasantry on an individualist basis, and a campaign for collectivising the poorer peasants became a basic part of the Five Years' Plan.

Attempts made in this direction had so far had little or no result.² Now, however, lured on the one hand by the promise of agricultural machinery, seed, and lower taxation, and on the other, seeing heavy penalties inflicted on those who resisted, the 'poor' and 'middle' peasants submitted as a whole with unexpected readiness, though not without some violence. In October 1928 the collective farms, or *kolkhozy*, included only 400,000 peasant households and two million hectares³; in October 1929 they had increased to one million families.⁴ By March 1st, 1930, they actually included some 13 million families or 50 per cent. of the whole peasant population, and 36 million hectares.⁵

Reasons for the amazing increase in the latter part of this period are not hard to find. At the end of May 1929 Stalin's supporters in the Communist

¹ Chamberlin, p. 201, and *Pravda*, December 4th, 1928.

² Mr. Kautsky (p. 40) says the collective farms decreased between 1922 and 1927.

³ A hectare equals $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres.

⁴ Baikaloff, *Soviet Agricultural Legislation* (*Slavonic Review*, June 1931).

⁵ Stalin, article in *Pravda*, March 3rd, 1930. This rapid increase quite outdistanced the capacity of the Government to supply the promised tractors and other machinery (Grinko, p. 156).

Party had achieved the aim set before them a year earlier and had gained control of the Central Council of the trade unions. Tomskey, the President, and other trade union leaders who had ventured to oppose collectivisation and the policy of rapid industrialisation, had been summarily relieved of office.¹ The Supreme Economic Council hastened to approve the *coup*,² and Stalin's grip on policy was tightened.

The prospects of the Plan were further improved by the advent to office in June 1929 of a British Labour Government, which early announced that credits given for Russian purchases in Great Britain could be officially guaranteed.

The results of the change in the balance of power were many. The first was an immediate intensification of the collectivising policy. The whole force of the trade unions could now be called upon to exercise pressure on the unhappy peasants, and members of the unions were directed to take an active part in reorganising agriculture on Socialist principles. Groups of workers, usually consisting of Young Communists, or of Communist 'cells' in factories, and later known as 'advance guards' or 'shock brigades,' were sent to State and collective farms to preach collectivisation, to press for subscriptions for a State loan, and to take energetic measures against any peasants, especially *kulaks*, who after harvest might conceal grain or sell it

¹ *Industrial and Labour Information*, July 8th, 1929, pp. 53-5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 56, quoting from the official *Trade and Industrial Gazette*, June 4th, 1929.

privately.¹ An ambitious programme of grain collection was drawn up, to be completed by December. Quotas were fixed for every area, and 'the combined forces of the Government, the trade unions, the co-operatives and the Party were mobilised' to secure them.²

The poor peasants were treated less harshly than the middle peasants or the *kulaks*, but the pressure on them was sufficiently severe to break down their resistance.³ Anyone who actively opposed collectivisation was liable to be listed as a *kulak* and have his entire goods confiscated.⁴ Thousands of German settlers attempted, mostly in vain, to leave Russia,⁵ and many peasants, before finally entering collective farms, slaughtered their live-stock rather than hand them over without compensation. But the Government was relentless, and in some districts collectivisation was automatically decreed by the authorities.⁶

The rapidity with which the movement progressed until March 1930 is therefore not difficult to explain. That the process had not been a voluntary one was shown by murders of imported managers of collective farms and by peasant risings, which won sympathy even from the Red Army. These finally obliged Stalin early in March 1930 to publish an article in *Pravda* repudiating extreme measures, and announcing that peasants must be brought more

¹ *Ibid.*, December 9th, 1929, pp. 365-7.

² Hoover, p. 95.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105. Zaitsev, p. 563.

⁵ Hoover, p. 101.

⁶ Hoover, p. 107.

gradually into the collective movement. To this end the *artel* was to be encouraged rather than the *commune*. This policy was duly endorsed by the Central Committee a few days later.¹

As a result of Stalin's pronouncement there was so great an exodus from the *kolkhozy* that in some areas the movement almost collapsed. Not more than some 24 per cent. of all peasant households were collectivised at the end of 1930.² The policy is once more being pressed, however, more especially in the areas producing wheat for export, such as the Northern Caucasus and Ukraine, where it has been decreed that all peasant holdings are to be collectivised during 1931.³ Officers and men retiring from the Red Army have been warned to give active help in the movement.⁴

It remains to examine the system into which the 'poor' and 'middle' peasants were pressed.

Collective farms or *kolkhozy*, we are told, are of three types. There are *communes*, in which members own in common not only land, machinery, horses and live-stock, but houses and even food products. They are further expected to live together, in large communal dwellings. Another type, the *artel*, is described below. There are also *tovaryschestva*, or 'societies for joint land cultivation,' in which only the land of the members is pooled, machinery and

¹ Ethan T. Colton, *The XYZ of Communism*, 1931, p. 186.

² Colton, p. 197, quoting a resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, December 19th, 1930.

³ Mr. Shenkman, *Foreign Trade of Soviet Russia (The Statist)*, March 21st, 1931.

⁴ Colton, p. 190.

animals remaining in individual possession. An official inquiry carried out at the end of 1929 showed that the number of *communes* was then very small, not more than four or five per cent. of the total number of *kolkhozy*. *Artels* were more numerous, about 20 per cent. of the total. The rest were very primitive co-operative societies which showed a tendency to disintegrate almost as quickly as they were formed.¹

In order to induce the peasants to accept a more rigid type of *kolkhozy*, *Model Articles of Association for artels* were officially published in March 1930.²

This document shows that, while any boundaries separating the arable holdings of the members of the *artel* were to be removed, and all pasture was to be held in common, the holdings and homesteads (orchards and gardens) were to be left for the individual use of the members of the *artel*, and were not to be communised. Productive live-stock and dairy products, draught animals, and the larger implements, were to be held in common, but one cow could be left for individual use. A minimum number of horses and the smaller agricultural implements might also be allotted to a holding.

Where 'small live-stock' (i.e. pigs and sheep) were reared, they were to be communised, but a certain number were to be left to the individual members, in numbers to be decided by the *artel*. Poultry were not to be communised, though collec-

¹ A. Baikaloff, *The Soviet Agrarian Policy*.

² Cmd. 3775, pp. 115 *et seq.*

tive farms could organise 'small live-stock and poultry enterprises.'

Any worker on attaining the age of sixteen might be admitted, but no *kulaks*, or others who had been deprived of electoral rights. This excluded clergy of all denominations, officers or Government servants of the Tsarist régime, former owners or managers of factories, all traders,¹ members of the former aristocracy, and members in general of the pre-1917 'upper classes.' Exceptions to this rule might be made for members of families among whom were to be found persons loyal to the Soviet régime, 'Red' partisans, soldiers of the Red Army, sailors of the Red fleet (of all ranks), or village male or female teachers on condition that they stood surety for their families.

Peasant families who before entering a collective group slaughtered or sold their live-stock, got rid of their implements, or 'with ill intent' disposed of their seed, were not to be admitted.

Each person entering an *artel* had to deposit an entrance fee of from 2 to 10 per cent. of the value of all property, whether communised or not, falling to his share of the holding, with the exception of articles of domestic or personal use. Where the principal source of income of the member was derived from outside employment such as that of teacher, surveyor or 'employee in institutions or organisations situated in the neighbourhood of the

¹ Even hawkers, as private traders, are voteless; also anyone not earning a living by 'productive work which is useful to the community.' Kautsky, p. 119.

artel,¹ the minimum entrance fee was to be 10 per cent. of his annual income. Agricultural labourers were not to pay more than 5 roubles. Workers permanently employed outside the collective farms were to pay an entrance fee of 3 per cent. of their annual wages in addition to the entrance fee of from 2 to 10 per cent. of the value of their property.

From the value of the communised property of a member (including farm-buildings) from 25 to 50 per cent. was to be credited to the reserve fund of the *artel* in such a way that the wealthier members paid more than the others.

Article 10 provided that a member who left the *artel* would have his 'share' returned to him, but the repayment was not to include the value of the land. No land was to be withdrawn from the pool through the resignation of a member. Those leaving the *artel* would only be able to obtain land 'from the free lands of the State.' As Government agents took pains to see that the best land was collectivised,¹ any exchange at best was likely to be a poor one.

The income of the *artel* had to provide for running expenses (presumably the expenses of the committee of management), 'for the support of persons who are unfit for work, for the reserve and other communal funds (from 10 per cent. to 30 per cent. to the reserve fund, and from 5 to 15 per cent. for other communal funds) and for the payment of labour.'² One may well wonder how much was usually available for the last purpose.

¹ Chamberlin, p. 205.

² Article 11, *ibid.*, p. 118.

Yet all the work of the *artel* had to be carried out by the personal labour of its members. Only persons having specialised knowledge or training (such as agronomists, engineers, or technicians), might be brought in for hired employment on agricultural work, though the hire of temporary labour might be allowed 'in exceptional cases where urgent work cannot be performed within the required time by the members of the *artel* working to their full capacity, and also in case of building work.'

That means were taken to ensure that members should 'work to their full capacity' is shown by the next article, which lays down that 'each member is allotted his work by the management of the *artel* in accordance with the internal regulations. *No member may refuse to do the work allotted to him.*'¹

This is followed by an article requiring that 'standards of output and costing shall be laid down, records shall be kept of the quality and quantity of work, and payment by piece and task work shall be adopted.' 'Advances' in kind or money might be made in the course of the year up to not more than 50 per cent. of the amount due to members for their work. A final settlement of pay was not to be made until the end of the economic year. It seems obvious that the proportion a member would receive of the remaining 50 per cent. due to him would depend on the quantity and quality of his labour.

From the earnings of those who worked outside the *artel* deductions were to be made of from 3 to 10

¹ Article 13. The italics are added.

per cent., the sum deducted being placed to the reserve fund of the establishment. Persons working outside the *artel* were therefore mulcted twice over.

While the *artel* might expect from the State not only agricultural machinery, but possibly credit assistance and 'agricultural technical services,' 'all produce'—presumably over the basic personal needs of the members¹—was to be delivered to the State and to co-operative organisations² at low prices fixed by the Government. In addition, stringent obligations to increase production were incurred by the *artel*. Members were bound to 'increase the amount of land under cultivation by making use of all the land available' and 'by improving and cultivating waste land; to make full use of all motive power and other means of production; to improve live-stock, pasture and arable land, and to develop all other branches of agricultural production.'

To ensure that these obligations were carried out an annual meeting of the members or a meeting of delegates was to elect by a show of hands a committee of management, to manage all the affairs of

¹ What a large proportion of their production the *kolkhozy* are obliged to surrender to the State is shown by a recent official investigation into the working of *kolkhozy* in the Northern Caucasus. According to this inquiry, in 1930, the total value of production per household on the *artels* where piece-work had been introduced, was 638 roubles, and in the *artels* working on a time-work basis, 409 roubles. The *artels* of the first type surrendered 368 roubles' worth of their production to the State (i.e. 57·6 per cent. of the gross value), and the *artels* of the second type, 195 roubles (or 47·6 per cent. of the total) (*Pravda*, April 20th, 1931). The rouble was nominally worth 2s. 1½d. on December 31st, 1930. ² One rouble = 100 kopeks.

² Presumably to the Central Union of Wholesale Co-operative Societies (known as 'Centrosoyus'). Though nominally independent, as the chief State home distributing agency, it is in effect, a State-controlled trust (see p. 95).

the *artel* for the ensuing year and to allot work among the members. In case a committee so elected should not be sufficiently zealous in exacting work, a 'supervisory commission' was to superintend the execution of the 'production plan.'

The articles therefore make it clear that the greater production aimed at by the authors of the policy of collective farming was to be achieved by allotting to each member a task which would require 'his full capacity,' by denying him any right of refusal, and by making his pay depend on the quality and quantity of the work performed. The *artel*, in effect, meant an extension to the ordinary peasant population of the principle of compulsory labour. If this was the case with the less rigid type of collective farm, it may be assumed that a no less rigorous system was in operation on the *communes* and State farms.