

AGRICULTURE UNDER SOVIET CONTROL

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order to gain a clear understanding of the agricultural system of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, it is necessary to compare it with the situation in independent Lithuania before the country was incorporated into the Soviet Union.

In February, 1918, Lithuania regained her independence after some 123 years of Russian occupation. One of the most important acts of the re-established state was the undertaking of a land reform. Prior to World War I, 450 families owned 3,500,000 acres of land. Each of these families owned an estimated minimum of at least 2,000 acres. Together, these 450 families owned 22% of all the land. This picture was drastically altered by the land reform, which was begun in 1918 and put into final legislative form in 1922. Under the law passed in the latter year, estates of more than 200 acres (the figure was later raised to 321 acres) were broken up and distributed to landless peasants, farm laborers and small landowners. Each head of a family was to receive not more than 49.4 acres (20 hectares). Land was also distributed to institutions of learning and culture, hospitals and other social and public organizations. The former owners of the land were compensated with government bonds bearing 3% interest and redeemable at any time within 36 years. The new owners were to pay for their land in 36 annual installments. The amount they paid depended on the quality of the grain and the quality of the land; there were four grades, judged according to the fertility of the soil.¹

Thus 73,032 heads of families were supplied with land; 7,918 of them were workers and employees 14,227 were artisans and 24,520 were new farmers, while 26,367 were smallholders who received additional land. By 1930 there were 287,380 farms, with a total area of 10,671,048 acres, in Lithuania. By 1939 there were approximately 335,720 farms.

These farms can be divided into three classes, based on their productive capacity. The first class comprises those farms with an area of 2.5 to 30 acres. These farms on the whole raised only enough grain to feed their families, and they sold little to the towns. Each had one or two horses, one to four cows and some poultry. At the end of 1939 about 160,000 of Lithuania's farms, or 56% were in this group.

The farms in the second class ranged in size from 30 to 70 acres. They produced various agricultural products to sell on the market. There were about 100,000 farms in this class.

Farms exceeding 70 acres — there were about 27,000 of these — made up the third class. This group of farms supplied the bulk of agricultural produce for export.

Lithuania was predominantly an agricultural country; 76% of her population engaged in farming. The backbone of Lithuania's agriculture was grain growing, but livestock breeding and dairy farming increased steadily in importance in the 22 years of the country's independence. The principal grain crops were winter rye, winter wheat, oats and barley. The cultivation of root crops, which were grown on only a small scale under Tsarist occupation, expanded considerably, especially potatoes, beets and sugar beets. Flax was produced in quantity, and Lithuania ranked as the third — largest flax exporter in the world. Dairy farming, livestock breeding and poultry farming were all important in the picture of Lithuanian agriculture. In general, great advances were made in all branches of agricultural production in independent Lithuania.

On June 15, 1940, Lithuania's independent life was interrupted by Soviet troops, which invaded and occupied the country. On July 21, 1940, after a Communist — controlled election, Lithuania was incorporated into the U.S.S.R. as a Union republic.

The agrarian policy followed by the Communists when they took over Lithuania and the other Baltic states was to nationalize all the land immediately and declare a radical land reform.² The Communists knew from experience that immediate full-scale collectivization was impracticable and would lead to strenuous opposition from the peasantry. Therefore the Communist leadership followed the same policy that had been pursued in collectivizing land in the Soviet Union. They sought to win over the landless peasants and the poor and middle-class farmers. The richer farmers were tolerated but were put under severe pressure. Soviet propagandists told the people that the large farms would be broken up in order to give more land to the poorer peasants. All farms larger than 30 hectares (74 acres) and all lands belonging to the churches and public organizations were nationalized.

Some of the nationalized land was given to landless peasants and some was added to farms under 10 hectares in size. The Communists were seeking to create a new class that would be in sympathy with the regime.

The majority of farms of 80 hectares and over were not broken up and redistributed but were converted into state farms. At the same time a campaign was begun against people who owned as much as 30 hectares; they were labeled "barons," "kulaks" and "enemies of the people." The communists sought through harassment and the imposition of a high tax to drive them into the state-organized "cooperatives," the forerunners of the kolkhozes, or collective farms.

The poorer peasants soon learned that the Communists intended to drive not only the rich farmers but everyone into the "cooperatives." The largest of the newly created farms of formerly landless peasants was so small that the peasants could barely eke out an existence. In addition, these new farmers had neither implements, seed nor livestock. Instead of supplying these materials, the government began organizing Machine and Tractor Stations and Horse Lending Points. These were wholly inadequate to provide the farms with traction power, but they were admirably suited to serve as centers of observation, supervision and propaganda.

The Communists constantly sought to educate the population in the advantages of "socialism". The duties, forms and taxes levied on the private farms were so high that the farmers could not meet their obligations. At the same time, the advantages and privileges to be found in the "cooperatives" were constantly reiterated. To overcome the strongest opposition to collectivization that of the larger farmers, the first mass deportation was carried out; it occurred shortly before the German invasion in June, 1941.

The collectivization of Lithuania was interrupted by the German attack. When the Soviet Army reoccupied the Baltic states, in the fall of 1944, the agrarian policies of 1940 were resumed and even extended. The maximum number of hectares that could be privately owned was reduced from 30 to 25. The class war against the "kulaks" was resumed and sharpened; they were now termed fascists and German collaborators. Anyone suspected of collaborating with the Germans had his land expropriated.

At first there was little talk of collectivization; the immediate task was the reconstruction of agriculture, which had been ravaged by the war. However, in the fall of 1947, when the economic situation had stabilized, the Soviet leadership gave the order for "voluntary" collectivization to begin in Lithuania and the other Baltic states.

Once again the Soviets followed the pattern of collectivization they had employed in the Soviet Union. "Activists" and Communist cadres came to the villages from the cities to induce the people to enter the kolkhozes voluntarily. These kolkhozes were formed by amalgamating the farms of the poor peasants; they turned out to be so small that the "kulaks" land was also taken and added to them. At first the "kulaks" were not even allowed to join the kolkhozes.

In Lithuania, as in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, there was strenuous opposition to collectivization. This opposition was both passive and active. Communist propaganda was full of shrill attacks on "bourgeois nationalists" and "kulaks" who were preventing and obstructing collectivization. The resistance in Lithuania was more active than that in the other Baltic states and lasted longer because the peasants were supported by a well-organized resistance movement.

To destroy this opposition and to step up the lagging tempo of collectivization, the Communists once again resorted to drastic measures. Mass deportations were carried out in May, 1948; altogether, more than 120,000 "kulaks" were banished from Lithuania.

With the full resources of a totalitarian state mobilized against the "kulaks," active resistance was eventually crushed. Rapid and intense collectivization followed; by the end of 1950, some 76% of the peasant families were collectivized. The Soviets had organized these families into 4,500 kolkhozes. In 1951 the economy of Lithuania was fully modeled on that of the Soviet Union and the integration of her system of agriculture with the U.S.S.R.'s was begun.

Lithuania under Soviet control has remained a predominantly agricultural country.³ The area under cultivation is greater than that of the two other Baltic states together. The sown area amounts to more than one-third of all the territory of the Lithuanian S.S.R. The Central Lithuanian lowland, in which about 60% of all agricultural activity is concentrated, is the greatest farming center. The land in the southeastern part of the country is least profitable for agriculture because of the

sandy soil and the marshes.

The same crops prevail in the Lithuanian S.S.R. as predominated in independent Lithuania. The chief grain crops are rye, wheat and barley. The Soviets have also attempted to develop the cultivation of fodder crops. A program to reclaim marshland and to increase the fertility of chemical fertilizers was introduced. As will be demonstrated later, the Soviets have had little success with these innovations.

The most extensively cultivated crop is still winter rye, which grows well in all parts of the Lithuanian S.S.R. This is a crop that does not require intensive care and that can be grown even in the less fertile region of eastern Lithuania; one third of the total crop is raised there.

Winter wheat is grown in the Central Lithuanian lowland, especially its northern part. The Soviets are trying to increase the amount of winter wheat grown. Spring wheat is raised in most parts of the country; western Lithuania is an important area for this crop, and winter wheat makes up 10% to 11% of all crops sown there.

Barley is a valuable forage and supply crop; it is used as food, for brewing beer and as fodder for cattle. It is grown in all parts of Lithuania and occupies 10% of the sown land, and in central and western Lithuania 15%. Soviet experimental stations have been working on new barley strains and claim success with the two new types.

Oats are sown especially in the Samogitian highland, on the coast and in eastern Lithuania. The soil of eastern Lithuania is also well suited to the cultivation of buckwheat, which constitutes between 5% and 15% of this area's grain. The Soviets have recently decided to increase corn production so as to have a base for cattle raising.

Among the nongrain crops, an important role is played by various types of grasses, especially clover. These grasses are sown on almost all the meadows in the lower Nemunas River region.

Flax is still the most important technical crop; in 1954 it comprised 4.4% of all sown areas in the country. The most extensive zones of flax cultivation are in western Lithuania, in the northeast and in parts of the Central Lithuanian lowland; in these regions, flax accounts for from 5% to 7% of all farm production.

Potatoes, which are used for food and fodder and for the starch industry, are supposedly grown in greater quantities than before the war, as are also sugar beets, especially in southern Lithuania. Among vegetables, those kolkhozes that have suitable conditions raise tomatoes, onions and beets. Among the fruits raised are cherries, plums, pears and — especially — apples.

One goal of Soviet agricultural policy has been to emphasize the role of livestock and cattle raising. The importance of the kolkhoz-owned livestock can be seen by the fact that animal husbandry brings in more than one-half of the collective farms' cash income. Animal husbandry plays an even greater role in the economies of the sovkhoses (state farms). The basic branches of animal husbandry here are dairy farming and pig raising; between them, these two branches account for more than 85% of the cash income of the sovkhoses.

There is a greater concentration of cattle and pigs in the Lithuanian S.S.R. than in the two other Baltic republics. Cows, sheep and pigs are raised in all parts of Lithuania, but they are raised in particularly great numbers in the northern regions of the Central Lithuanian highland, in Sudare and on the land at the mouth of the Nemunas River.

Animal husbandry depends on varied fodder — supply bases, depending on the type of livestock raised. An important part of the food supply is, of course, furnished by the republic's meadow and pasture areas. Various kolkhozes raise products that are used for feeding cows and pigs; these include grain feed, corn and potatoes.

There are two basic breeds of cattle in Lithuania; they are the most productive and the best-suited to the local climatic and feeding conditions. The first of these breeds was bred from a local stock, a Dutch breed and a Swedish breed; this breed has existed in Lithuania since the 18th century. The average weight of the cows is about 500 kilograms, and on leading kolkhozes and sovkhoses it reaches 550 kilograms and more. The second breed is generally smaller in size, gives less milk, but of a higher quality. Cattle are raised in all parts of the Lithuanian S.S.R.

Sheep breeding occupies a relatively subordinate place in the Lithuanian S.S.R. The predominant breed is the black-head sheep, which is valuable for both meat and wool. The wool yield is 3 to 3.5 kilograms, and the average weight is 55 to 60 kilograms.

Lithuanians have engaged in horse breeding since ancient times. In occupied Lithuania the same two basic breeds have been continued; these are the heavy-duty horse and the short Samogitian breed, which is distinguished by its great endurance and is found in the eastern regions of the Lithuanian S.S.R. The heavy-duty horses weigh an average of 650 to 750 kilograms and have a great work capacity.

The kolkhoz has remained the basis of the agricultural system of Soviet — controlled Lithuania. In the first years after

collectivization, the number of collective farms was rather large; in 1950, for example, there were 4,500 of them. The more recent policy of the Communists has been to amalgamate the kolkhozes, thus decreasing their number and increasing their size. In 1952 and 1953 there were 2,200, and this number fell to 1,800 in 1954 and 1955.⁴ In 1956 there were 1,900 collective farms. The size of these farms, in terms of numbers of households, ranges from those with 100 households (8% of the total) to more than; 500 (.4% of the total); 47.7% of all collective farms have between 100 to 200 households. The average kolkhoz is 2,400 hectares in size, including 1,500 hectares of arable land.

Up to the beginning of 1958, the kolkhozes in the Lithuanian S.S.R., like those in the rest of the U.S.S.R., were serviced by Machine and Tractor Stations. The Soviets established 40 of these stations in 1940. After the war, they increased this number — to 113 in 1950 and 127 in 1953. In 1954 and 1955 the Lithuanian S.S.R. had 135 Machine and Tractor Stations, whose mechanized equipment included 11,912 tractors (in terms of 15 horsepower units), 1315 grain combines, 433 flax combines, 84 beet combines and 1,505 threshing machines. As a result of Khrushchev's call for the disbanding of all Machine and Tractor Stations in the U.S.S.R., this equipment has presumably been sold to the collective farms.

By 1950 the Soviets had set up 113 state farms in the Lithuanian S.S.R. Between 1952 and 1955 this number was reduced to 87. In 1955 the sovkhoses occupied about 5% of the country's farm land. Their average size was about 2,500 hectares. Recently, however there seems to be policy of expanding the sovkhoses at the expense of the kolkhozes. The amount of land possessed by the state farms increased from 200,000 hectares in 1954 to 300,000 hectares in 1955. The number of sovkhoses rose from 87 in 1955 to 94 in 1956. In the years 1955 and 1956 the number of pigs on the sovkhoses increased from 113,000 to 149,000 and the number of cattle from 47,000 to 57,000. This latter figure marks an increase of 21% in the number of cattle on the sovkhoses of the Lithuanian S.S.R., as against an increase of only 5% for the sovkhoses of the Soviet Union as a whole in this same period. This increase is almost exclusively the result of adding on the cattle of those kolkhozes that were converted into sovkhoses.

The Lithuanian S.S.R. plans to set up more new sovkhoses; at a session of its Supreme Soviet, the Lithuanian Minister of Finance disclosed that the 1957 budget appropriations to the Ministry of State Farms for development purposes were 36, 800,000 rubles more than in 1956.⁵

Despite the claims of Communist propaganda, the Soviet system of collective agriculture has failed miserably in comparison to the privately owned economy of independent Lithuania. This can be seen from the Soviet Union's own official data. Lithuanian farmers are paying a heavy price for the "blessings" of collectivization. For example, there has been a marked decline in the total amount of sown land since the Communists took control of Lithuania; in 1940, before mass collectivization, the figure was 2,497,000 hectares; in 1950 it had declined to 2,294,000 hectares, and in 1955 it was only 2,005,000 hectares. That is, since the Soviets took control they have managed to lose 492,000 hectares of sown land. The number of cattle has declined in similar fashion: In 1941 there were 1,054,000 head of cattle, including 782, 000 cows; in 1957, five years after the war, there were only 994,000 head of cattle, including 558,000 cows.

The Communists have maintained that among the chief purposes of the kolkhoz system are the provision of a firm foundation for developing animal husbandry and achieving increased harvests. However, the total number of cattle has declined rather than risen, and the Communists have had little success in fulfilling its harvest quotas. The Lithuanian S.S.R. failed to fulfill its 1955 grain-delivery plan. There is no precise information on the 1956 harvest, but the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Agriculture announced that all the Union republics had fulfilled their 1956 schedules for delivery and sale of grain to the state 'except the Lithuanian and Estonian Republics'.

One of Khrushchev's innovations in agriculture has been the emphasis on corn not only as a grain crop but also for silage. Khrushchev holds that by cultivating fallow and virgin lands and by using corn as fodder, he can increase the production of livestock. All regions of the U.S.S.R. followed Khrushchev's dicta and began to emphasize corn. In 1955 the Lithuanian S.S.R. sowed 17, 000 hectares to corn for grain and 135,000 hectares to corn for silage and fodder.⁶ Khrushchev was forced to admit at the 20th Party Congress that Lithuania — and Kazakhstan, Latvia, Estonia, Belorussia and Karelo — Finland as well — had failed to meet its targets because of inexperience with this new crop.

As Naum Jasny, an expert on Soviet agriculture, put it, 'The precarious situation of agriculture in the Baltic states can be seen in the abnormally high quotas demanded for 1960 in the Party's directives to the Sixth Five-Year Plan.'⁷

A clear picture of the critical position of Lithuanian agriculture can be gained from a consideration of the yields per hectare. The Soviet leaders themselves have shown considerable uneasiness over this phase of agriculture. A report of the Party Central Committee and the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers disclosed that 'low grain yields, not exceeding three to four quintals per hectare, have been obtained for several years by many collective and state farms' in the Baltic states (and also in the northeastern oblasts of the Russian Federation and Belorussia) .⁸ In 1935 to 1939, when Lithuania was an independent state, the average harvest was 11.8 quintals per hectare.⁹ As Jasny indicates, it may be necessary to go back 100 to 200 years to find a yield as low as the three to four quintals per hectare obtained by many kolkhozes in the Lithuanian S.S.R.

The reasons for the failure of Lithuania's collectivized agriculture are not difficult to find. The chief and basic cause of this failure is the unwillingness and apathy of the individualist-minded peasant, who wants to own his own land and has no

desire to become a mere laborer for the state. The Lithuanian peasant, like the peasants in the rest of the U.S.S.R., will devote more time and energy to working his own small plot of land than he will to the communal kolkhoz fields.

Other reasons for the failure of the Soviet system of agriculture may be noted. After the war the Soviets completely disrupted the old system of farming, and communist "activists", in their haste to collectivize the country, ineptly consolidated hundreds of farms. This was often done on the orders of Communists who had little understanding of agriculture. The result was that many hectares of arable land were turned into swampland and animal husbandry was harmed. The Soviet insistence on creating huge collective and state cattle farms also led to many problems of housing and feeding cattle that it took the Soviets a long time to solve.

The same errors of Communist management of the kolkhoz system in other parts of the U.S.S.R. were also to be found in Lithuania. The expulsion of the "kulaks" deprived the country of an energetic and hard-working group of farmers and also caused a shortage of manpower. With the decrease in the number of horses there has been a consequent decrease in the supply of manure, and insufficient artificial fertilizer has been produced. The work of the Machine and Tractor Stations was poor and the cost of the work to the kolkhozes was high. At the same time, the Machine and Tractor Stations did not supply all the tractor power needed. Other reasons for the failure of the Soviet system include incompetent management at the level of the kolkhoz itself and at higher levels, the exceedingly high delivery quotas demanded by the state combined with low state prices for collective farm produce, the demand that Lithuanian peasants volunteer for work on the virgin lands, and the transfer of tractors and combines to the virgin lands in Siberia.

It is difficult not to conclude that the Soviet system of collectivized agriculture in occupied Lithuania, as in the rest of the U.S.S.R., is nothing else than modern serfdom.

NOTES

1. This data on agriculture in independent Lithuania and that following is taken from Anicetas Simutis, **The Economic Reconstruction of Lithuania After 1918**, Columbia University Press, New York, 1942.
2. For a summary of this policy see: Hans Petersen, **Die Sowjetische Agropolitik in den Baltischen Staaten, 1940-1952**, "Ost-Europa", Vol. III, June, 1953, pp. 191 ff.
3. The following survey of contemporary Lithuanian agricultural resources is taken from a Soviet history of Lithuania; **Litovskaya S. S. R.**, edited by K.K. Beliukas, Yu. I. Bulabas, I.V. Komar, State Geographical Literature Publishing House Moscow, 1955
4. The sources for the information on kolkhozes, sovkhoses, M. T. S., etc. are: **Narodnoe kho-zyaistvo SSSR, statisticheskii sbornik** (1956), State Statistical Publishing House (Central Statistical Administration of the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers). Moscow; **Large Soviet Encyclopedia Yearbook**, edited by B.A. Vvedenskii, Moscow, 1957.
5. "Sovetskaya Litva," Vilnius, March 13, 1957.
- 6.. **Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR, statisticheskii sbornik** 1955, Moscow.
7. Naum Jasny, **The Soviet 1956 Statistical Handbook: A Commentary** Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 1957.
8. "Pravda", January 17, 1957, as quoted in Jasny, op. cit., p. 98.
- 9.. This data is from **The International Yearbook of Agricultural Statistics**, International Institute of Agriculture, 1946.