

A 77 billion rouble carrot?

The original Brezhnev Food Program of 1982 carried the price tag of a "seven-year effort to reduce food wastage and upgrade food processing and storage by a 77 billion rouble investment program." This number, and especially its inflated Western rouble-dollar equivalent of \$127 billion (official Russian exchange rate is R = \$1.65), is currently being dangled in front of Western European and U.S. agro-industry export firms as an imminent possible market for their exports.

"The Soviets are re-circulating this figure in order to encourage generous credit terms from the West," one Austrian expert stresses. The 77 billion rouble figure was developed during the early 1980s, when oil and gas export prices to the West were at extremely high levels.

"You must look at when the food plan was produced," one West European expert on Soviet agriculture problems stressed in recent discussion. "Now, today, because of falling oil revenues, the Soviets must correct these plans. It is not possible to invest as much as thought in the past. Hence, what I call their 'privatization' is the result of their lacking money," he stressed.

"If you lease soil to the farmer for up to 50 years, it costs

you, the state, no money, so the new farm policy is designed simply to increase output without increase of investment. The problem is that the local barriers to this change are terrible. Local authorities are sabotaging the implementation. And the state is having severe problems finding farmers willing to sign such a lease."

In addition, he reports that harvesting machinery is in generally poor condition, with spare parts lacking. If you put together peasant indifference, rotting of grain in storage for lack of inside storage or covering, and lack of efficient transport infrastructure from field to processing center to city, best estimates are that Russian grain loss between field and consumption is between 25-33%. The comparable figure for Western Europe is 5-8%. This then means that the net effect of a 200 million ton harvest is between 135-150 million tons of usable grain.

The dimensions of the Soviet food problem are staggering. But every Western agronomist intimate with the actual situation inside Russia today stresses the enormous potential to revolutionize the situation and make Russia into a great grain producing country. The principal obstacle, they stress, is not climate or soil, but culture.

Top military brass runs Russian food economy

One of the most striking Soviet developments in 1988 was the militarization of the food economy. The task of upgrading the food sector on a crash basis and meeting the priority assignment of assuring adequate food stocks has been entrusted to a select group of people.

Who is running Moscow's crash program? The same leaders of the Soviet military-industrial complex who directed the Ogarkov War Plan military buildup. Moscow's highly publicized investment shift, where certain defense industry machine tool and other plants have been converted to food industry-earmarked production, is not, as some fools in the West believe, a "shift" from defense to the "civilian" sector. It is the vast augmentation of the military sector to include the entirety of Soviet agriculture and food industry under its jurisdiction.

The food supply has been accorded *military-security* priority number one, a decision institutionalized at the February 1988 CC Plenum with the following key personnel changes:

1) Yuri Maslyukov, previously in charge of the military industry component of the State Planning Agency,

Gosplan, was made the boss for Gosplan itself, i.e., put in charge of *all* state economic planning.

2) That Plenum appointed one Oleg Baklanov to Central Committee Secretary. Baklanov had been the boss for all Soviet missile and space-based military equipment production, in short, the person most entrusted by Ogarkov to successfully implement the Soviet offensive missile and "SDI" style pre-war buildup programs. In the view of this writer, this was the most stunning illustration of Moscow's wartime priority assigned to food. Baklanov is now in charge of expanding and modernizing Soviet food storage, transport, and processing, and is in charge of the strategic stockpiling program.

Moscow is already preparing military conquest options to secure food supplies. The first case has already occurred, with the de facto partition of Afghanistan. Moscow is keeping northern Afghanistan under permanent occupation, for geopolitical reasons, but also because the north is Afghanistan's breadbasket. Besides feeding the northern population, the north's annual surplus of wheat feeds the rest of Afghanistan—another 10 million people.

In the partitioning of Afghanistan, that wheat surplus will go to feed Soviet Central Asia, freeing the European U.S.S.R. from this burden. Afghanistan's north also produces a cotton surplus, which now is part of the Soviet cotton crop, thus giving Moscow the ability to transfer some of the cotton lands in Central Asia to wheat crops.

—Konstantin George