

**AN EVOLUTION OF AGRARIAN
POLICIES IN USSR (1917 - 1935)
A REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
UNIVERSITY OF POONA
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY [IN ECONOMICS]**

**BY : BHASKER P. MUJUMDAR
JULY 1992**

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Bhaskar P. Mujumdar

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Introduction

The two major events of the twentieth century are "October Revolution" of the USSR in 1917, and "disintegration of the USSR" in the late 80's and early 90's. The October Revolution marked the advent of socialism in Russia. On the other hand, "glasnost" and "Perestroika"⁽¹⁾ introduced by Gorbachev⁽²⁾ leading to the disintegration of USSR, marked the end of socialism (which was synonymous with one party system in the USSR.) and rise of democratic set up in the USSR and other provinces of the former USSR. Hence, the total time span of about eighty years, which separated these two events becomes a focus of interest for the analysts in the various fields of social sciences.

There were many causes behind the collapse of the Soviet System. One of the major cause was the role played by the ideological dogmas. Role of the bolshevist ideological dogmas in the evolution of various irrational and contradictory state policies is undisputed. Agrarian Policy of the USSR was one of the main aspect, which suffered most due to the ideological dogmas of bolsheviks. Impact of such agrarian policies on the agrarian sector was so deep and longlasting that even in 1980's Gorbachev's reforms started with the agrarian measures adopted to gear up the production level (by increasing the labour productivity) in the agrarian sector.⁽³⁾

Infact, Karcz in differnt context⁽⁴⁾ says that "It is therefore not surprising that problems of agricultural production and those related to farm organization have always been closely linked to major economic policy decisions at crucial junctures of Soviet history",⁽⁵⁾ which has been true for all years in the past.

Even though, it is true that agrarian policy in the USSR was always the controversial issue over the past eighty years, period from 1917 to 1930's is relatively more important for analyzing the evolution of agrarian policy in USSR. This is so because of the fact that the concerned period marked the evolution of the Soviet System, which lasted for the next fifty years, and also because of the very fact that the famous "industrialization" phase in the USSR marked the concerned period. Dobb (in 1947) says "When we contemplate the economic and social changes which have taken place during the past thirty years over the area which used to be called the Russian Empire, novelty and magnitude compete for our attention. It is doubtful in any previous age so profound a change, affecting so large an area of the world's surface, has ever occurred within such a narrow span of time".⁽⁶⁾

One important angle of the industrialization phase in USSR was the role of the agrarian sector. In Karcz's opinion, role of peasantry in the industrialization process of USSR can be summarized as "When the leaders of the Soviet Russia

launched an extremely ambitious industrialization drive in the fall of 1928, they had to come to grips with the problem of extracting the surplus produce of the countryside in terms of either farm products or of human labour".⁽⁷⁾

In our present study, we focus our attention on the evolution of the agrarian policies in USSR during the period starting from October Revolution and ending with the industrialization phase in the USSR (i.e. from 1917 to mid 30's). In our first chapter, we will begin with the brief review of the peasantry's role in the Marxian scheme of historical materialism. This will help us to grasp the Leninist interpretation, and implementation of Marxian Scheme in the USSR. Ultimately all this will help us in understanding the ideology behind the October Revolution in 1917, and peasantry's role in it as envisaged by bolsheviks.

A critical review of the agrarian policy measures adopted during the seven years immediately after the revolution (i.e. from 1916 to 1925) is attempted in our Chapter-2. Within this short period (from 1916 to 1925) of seven years two phases of the agrarian policy measures namely War Communism (from 1918 till 1921) and new economic policy (from 1921 onwards) were adopted by the bolsheviks. These two types of the agrarian measures were representing the two diagonally opposite extremes. We will also try to identify the causes

for such a drastic shift in the bolshevik's agrarian policy. and it's implications. This would enable us to focus our attention upon the ideological dogmas, which hampered the implementation of rational agrarian measures.

A brief account of the various arguments concerning famous "industrialization debate" is given in the third chapter. This debate (in 20's and early 30's) was regarding the path of industrialization to be followed in the USSR. A review of these arguments would help us to view the peasantry's role in the industrialization process as envisaged by various groups amongst bolsheviks. Such an analysis becomes more important for us, if we notice that Stalin's agrarian policy after 1928 was similar to the measures suggested by Preobrazensky, who was one amongst those involved in the debate.

In our last chapter (chapter-4), we have furthered the review of subsequent agrarian measures adopted during late 20's and early 30's. During this period (after 1925), compulsory grain procurements, dekulakization campaign, and ultimately collectivization campaign caused a great deal of sufferings for the peasantry in USSR. A review of the agrarian policy during this period would help us to throw light upon the role of bolshevist ideological prenotions in shaping the irrational and suppressive agrarian measures during this period. Thus, a present study attempts to review an evolution of agrarian

policies during the period of 1917 to 1930's, which gave rise to the emergence of a typical agrarian structure in USSR which lasted for the next fifty years. (8)

Notes and References (Introduction)

- (1) "Pereostroika" means restructuring, and "glassnost" means openness and freedom.
- (2) Gorbachev was the last president of the former USSR, who introduced the democratic elements in USSR for the first time since its advent of socialism in 1917.
- (3) Gorbachev introduced the concept of "brigades" which was a sort of contract system to give more incentives to the agricultural labour in order to increase their productivity.
- (4) In the context of the surplus extraction for the sake of industrialization.
- (5) Karcz J.F. (edi) (1967): Soviet and East European Agriculture : University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angles, PP= viii-ix.
- (6) Dobb.M. (1953): Soviet Economic Development since 1917: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, London, P-I.
- (7) Karcz J.F. : (1967) : OP.cit, P= ix
- (8) At this juncture, it is necessary to mention that this period in the USSR was marked by the use of falsified statistical data (by the rulers) as a measure of propaganda. Hence, the analysis based on this data has considerable limitations. In this context Nove says "The events of 1929-34 constitute one of the great dramas of history. They need much more space than they possibly receive here, and a more eloquent pen than the author's

to describe them. They need also a sounder base in reliable data than is available at present to any historian, in East or West" [Nove.A. (1969): An Economic History of the USSR, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, P=160]. But this should not be viewed as an impossibility of the analysis of the concerned period. Infact, Dobb [Dobb.M.(1953):OP.cit, P-33] says "To describe them in an atmosphere uncharged with controversy is impossible. But one can hope at least to approach an objective study of these historic years by endeavouring to see facts as they were and to present issues of policy as they appeared to the eyes of the participators".