Document 17 *continued*

cloth, and if he receives as much as five meters in the course of three months it has nothing to do with the size of his family, and two hundred grams of sugar a month for each dependent. Even the members of the VKP(b) themselves laugh at such an abnormality . . . and as a result what happens is that everyone tries to abandon the kolkhoz work of cultivating land and to secure his well-being somewhere at an industry.

Perhaps some party officials did actually laugh at the abnormality of such a policy. The document provides evidence of inequality among collective farm members who, not unlike independent peasants earlier, felt downtrodden. At issue was a phenomenon that became one of the most persistent in collective farm policy, one that was to have far-reaching consequences.

At the same time, in addition to required deliveries of agricultural products, numerous other requirements also applied to kolkhozes. Collective farm members complained that directive after directive came down from the authorities soliciting contributions to the share fund, making deductions for the special indivisible kolkhoz fund, demanding compulsory deposits in savings banks, recruiting tractor work brigades for machine-tractor stations (MTSes), and so forth.[27]

The situation on state enterprises in rural areas, state farms, government farms, and MTSes (of which there were still very few) was in no way better. One of the advantages of the New Countryside, according to the propaganda, was wide-scale use of mechanized labor. Equipment was scarce, however, and that available was of low quality. Maintenance personnel were virtually nonexistent, and nowhere were there enough spare parts. The leadership attempted to solve these objective problems by employing administrative and punitive measures. Source materials report that mechanics were tried for the shortage of spare parts, that "the best workers, up to their ears in soot, are deserting the tractor front," that personnel in repair shops changed daily. What is more, payment for work done by MTSes was onerous for collective farms. Collective farm workers feared that "the government will take the entire harvest for the work done by tractors."[28]

START

Once implemented, collectivization had a catastrophic effect on

agricultural production. Animal husbandry suffered more than anything else because of the mass slaughter of cattle when peasants joined collective farms. The situation in grain production looked somewhat different. According to official data, in 1930 (a year of extraordinarily favorable weather conditions) eighty-four million tons of grain were harvested; seventy million tons were harvested in 1931, sixty-seven million in 1932, and sixty-eight million in 1933. Figures of this sort indeed seem considerable.[29] Their attainment, however, was against the background of a disintegrating independent peasant sector and of much organizational confusion in the building of kolkhozes. State grain procurement nonetheless grew steadily, thanks to intensified strong-arm pressure on the rural areas. This meant that less and less grain was left for village peasants' domestic use. Grain crops often passed by kolkhoz grain barns, going directly to state grain procurement points. The results were increasingly clear signs of pauperization and impoverishment in the rural areas—and the approach of famine.

A report from Krasnoiar Raion in Middle Volga Krai is typical: "The people of Tarasov village are starving; they are swelling up from starvation, and the other day one man died from hunger. Several have gone to the city of Kozlov in search of a living and to buy bread and at home, as during wartime, remain only women, children, and old men. Everyone is cursing Soviet power and going off to work in industry. We don't know how things will be with the third Bolshevik spring because not only will there be no seed, but there will not even be people and animal power."[30]

Reports about famine were received from Kazakhstan, from Leningrad Oblast, from the land of the Kalmyks. According to "illiteracy liquidator" V. I. Gaidamaka,

> Nineteen thirty-one became a development year for our kolkhoz. In that year we brought in a harvest of about five hundred tons of grain, we sowed 625 hectares of winter wheat, and we improved our animal husbandry. We fulfilled the state grain procurement plan of 3,250 centners by 100 percent, but many collective farm members were left hungry all of 1932 because the five tons of grain put aside not only failed to provide food for three hundred collective farm dependents, but in addition the spring sowing area (890 hectares) remains unplanted. . . . The collective farm workers are leaving in groups to

search for a living with the intention of later bringing their families to live with them. They leave at night so that the board members of the kolkhoz won't stop them and make them fulfill the many kolkhoz tasks that have not been completed. Also leaving are Komsomol members and candidate party members. During the last ten days about thirty men have left the kolkhoz. . . . The spring plan is threatened with failure.[31]

The same kind of letters came from North Caucasus Krai, in particular from the "Giant" State Farm on the Sal'sk steppe, the success of which had been widely propagandized in the press. From Chamlyk *stanitsa* (Cossack village), former Red Army soldier V. M. Kovalchuk, reported:

Document 18

Letter from V. M. Kovalchuk on flight from collective farms in North Caucasus Krai, 1932. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 1, d. 236, l. 8. Typed copy.

I write not as one who gives in to difficulties, not as an enemy of Soviet power, but as a man who fought for it.

In Chamlyk Raion there is one kolkhoz, second in size in the krai, that fulfills a three hundred thousand–pood state grain procurement, but the trouble is this socialist farm is melting like the spring snow, people are fleeing the kolkhoz for who knows where. At the kolkhoz they took all the grain away and left a little field corn for the people to live on. All this is the result of the kolkhoz's unavoidable disintegration, and what a disgrace that is!

The kolkhoz plants wheat and lives on corn. Everyone's mood is almost anti-Soviet. Dear comrades, now you go and take any one of us, set in front of us only field corn without any grease, dress us in rags, shoes without soles, and force us out to work on the steppe when the temperature is twenty-five degrees below zero; wouldn't any of you become a deviant and curse all and everything?

Here is one example. At the stanitsa we have some thirteen thousand hectares of land; before the revolution there were twelve thousand people, and now there are eight thousand. There has been a decrease in people, the rest don't have the strength to do the harvesting; as a result thousands of hectares of various crops are rotting on the steppe, overgrown with weeds.

The people have become pretty malicious, they look disapprovingly at the Communists, the Communist cell has lost its authority. Members of the party also. Now we have to meet contract requirements for delivery of hens, this also intensifies anger among the peasants. Out of people fighting for Soviet

Document 18 *continued*

power they are now making people who are against Soviet power because every last kernel of grain has been taken from them and they have nothing to chew on. Every night seven to ten households abandon the stanitsa. This on account of the good life. I've permitted myself to express my opinion as one comrade to another, to the masses I speak differently, the way Soviet authority talks.

Here is an anonymous letter from Novocherkassk stanitsa:

Document 19

Anonymous letter to *Izvestia* on rumors in North Caucasus Krai, 1932. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 1, d. 236, ll. 4–5. Typed copy.

Dear *Izvestia* Newspaper, Tell me if it's true that there's a directive that all the collective farm workers be sent into industry and foreigners brought in to take their place. So allegedly the authorities take all the grain away and do not leave any for us to eat or plant, so that the collective farm members themselves have abandoned the kolkhozes and gone to work in industry. Further, they deprive all able-bodied workers of their rations so that they will croak faster and not impede the building of socialism. To the children of collective farm workers barley bread is given that is half bran, one hundred grams per child and nothing more because it's impossible to build socialism out of Russians so that only the strong remain and the weak croak.

That all collective farm workers went to work in industry is a correct policy, but regarding the weak it is not correct. Because the weakest of all are newborn children whose mother is starving and cannot give them the breast. This means [that only] children more than two years old survive, and there won't be any young.

We collective farm workers do not believe that the higher authorities want to take all our grain away, even the seed grain, we petitioned RIK, they send us to Novocherkassk Raion, there they don't even want to listen to us. It's already the beginning of March and our kolkhoz doesn't know if it's going to get grain for sowing or not. There's a real kolkhoz for you—without grain, without sowing! Dear *Izvestia* Newspaper, Don't you take away our faith that kolkhozes will lead us not to ruin but to a better life, and that if we starve, guilty are not the higher authorities but the local ringleaders. Dear *Izvestia* Newspaper, Let there be at least some good white bread for babes in arms, let there be some seed for sowing, otherwise things will get even worse.

Analogous letters came from Western Siberia, where in 1931, despite a poor harvest, the planned state grain procurement was fulfilled strictly. One letter writer urged newspapers not to anger the population by writing about starvation in India. In his opinion, the good life in the USSR could be found only in Moscow and Leningrad, whereas misery reigned everywhere else.[32]

Collective farm member A. P. Kokurin wrote from Mordovia:

Document 20

Letter of complaint to *Izvestia* from A. P. Kokurin, Mordovia, 1932. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 1, d. 236, l. 6. Typed copy.

I have a family of nine, and what did I have before the kolkhoz? I had all the produce I needed to feed my family, and fuel, and I clothed and shod them. Had a horse and three head of sheep. Delivered to the government twenty poods of rye, forty poods of millet, oats, potatoes, and hemp. I have worked on the kolkhoz, I have honestly earned 355 labordays, but I no longer eat bread but chaff and taters, we don't have enough to resole our shoes. My children have turned black from malnutrition. Respected editors, is there no way to leave the kolkhoz rather than perish there?

Worker A. P. Nikishin in his letter to VTsIK thus describes the condition of a specially subsidized kolkhoz in the Privolzhsky Raion of Middle Volga Krai, where:

Document 21

Letter to VTsIK from A. P. Nikishin on starvation in Middle Volga Krai, 1932. RGAE, v. 7486s, op. 1, d. 236, l. 33. Typed copy.

. . . In the fall of 1930 the land was all plowed and the following spring sown, and the harvest OK, a good one. The time came to gather the grain, the collective farm workers reaped the harvest without any hitches, . . . but it came time to deliver to the state and all the grain was taken away. Even leaving a big percent of the grain wouldn't be enough to sow our land. Collective farm workers began to come to the board for their share. They were refused, there was no grain. . . . And at the end they stopped giving out shares to almost all of the collective farm workers. And at the present time collective farm workers with small children are perishing from hunger. They don't eat sometimes for a week and don't see a piece of bread for several days. People have begun to swell up because of hunger. Collective farm workers with great effort manage to get hold of some money, abandon their families and small children, and themselves go into hiding. And all the males have departed, despite the fact that in the near future the spring planting is coming. Horse power has almost all died, for 360 householders eighty horses were left, and those any day now are as good as dead. And collective farm workers, each expects to die any day now from hunger, and it's even worse for the poor independent peasants. The crops were taken away and everybody can barely move on their legs. . . . The same story in several kolkhozes of the raion, and this situation threatens to devastate the spring sowing campaign.

Document 21 *continued*

The directives for such policy came, naturally, from above, and the local leaders made every effort to carry them out. A citizen named M. Prokunin wrote:

Document 22

Letter from M. Prokunin on starvation in Middle Volga Krai, 1932. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 1, d. 236, l. 32. Typed copy.

On a casual trip through K[inel']-Cherkassy Raion of Middle Volga Krai, I drop in to the office of Comrade Kozurov, the chairman of the raion executive committee. In front of him stands at attention the chairman of a rural soviet [one of the Twenty-Five Thousand workers sent to the provinces] and reports: "In my rural soviet [of Kromov] the following situation has arisen: the collective farm workers have no bread, hungry stablemen are not feeding the cattle, they say 'I'm hungry and I'd rather sit at home on the roof of the stove.' The cattle are dying from malnutrition, the collective farm workers snatch parts of the carcasses and eat them." Chairman of the Raion Executive Committee Kozurov, [instead of] sharing his opinion, giving advice to the chairman, shouted: "Don't come to me any more with small matters like these. Have you lost your mind? You all got six poods and ate it all up, and village leaders are panicking, [and] you've come with this small matter. Today I will raise [the matter] of you at the meeting of the Raion Committee Bureau. We will reach practical conclusions on how you've handled the matter. Can you believe what he's complaining about? He has no bread on his kolkhoz, they eat carrion, I as RIK chairman receive seventeen kilograms of flour. I make do with

Document 22 *continued*

it. And his rural soviet got six poods for the year and it's already gone. Don't come to me any more with small matters like this, or I'll have you tried." The poor chairman of the rural soviet left the office and began to cry, "How can I go back to my rural soviet? I don't dare show my face there." As bad luck would have it, the seasonal laborers returned from logging work in the Ul'ianovsk Raion; there, too, no bread had been given out.

For the local leader the critical situation on the kolkhoz probably was tiny compared to some of his tasks, tasks unknown to the chairman of the rural soviet. In 1932 the situation became even more complex. Ivan Litvinov from Novooskol'sk Raion of the Central Black Earth Oblast wrote to *Izvestia:*

Document 23

Letter to *Izvestia* from I. Litvinov on refugees from Ukraine in Central Black Earth Oblast, 1932. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 1, d. 236, l. 13. Typed copy.

Day after day all over our raion move starving Ukrainian peasants, collective farm members and independent peasants alike, in strings of carts. For any crust of bread whatsoever they part with all their belongings, footwear, clothing, or anything else they have. When you question them, they reply: "We had a good harvest, but Soviet authorities 'procured' our grain, put into effect their plans and tasks for us to the point that we were left without a pound of bread." When you ask them, "Who is to blame?" They answer "Soviet power, which has taken our grain away from us down to the last kernel, dooming us to hunger and poverty. It's worse than it was under serfdom."

I myself am a worker, a Komsomol member since 1928, and I wonder how the Ukraine can be hungry after a good harvest. We also have collective farms, and there's enough bread, but why is there such a situation of all places in the Central Black Earth Oblast? I direct the attention of *Izvestia* to this phenomenon because wherever "hungry carts" arrive they create a panic and provoke hostile speeches against Soviet power.

The same thing occurred in the Northern Caucasus. Ivan Gusev from the Budënny Kolkhoz in the Ol'khov Rural Soviet of Novocherkassk Raion wrote:

Document 24

Letter from I. Gusev on food shortages in North Caucasus Krai, 1932. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 1, d. 236., l. 12. Typed copy.

The members of the Kolkhoz Named for Budënny find themselves without grain, the grain we had was taken away by the former Shakhtin Raion, and Novocherkassk Raion says: "You gave it to us yourselves, hand over your documents. For food, they say, you'll get no grain, but we'll give you grain for planting." But whatever shall we do without bread, what will we have to eat until the next harvest?

He who bolted in time for work in industry did well for himself, he can live and has bread to eat, and the others made a dash for it, but late, written permissions are not being given now by the rural soviet, which says: "If you all leave, there will be no one to do the work." Now we are left naked, barefoot, two hundred grams of barley bread a day and we eat cabbage without butter. It's terrible to see a big strong man cry, and he cries because they deceived him with the kolkhoz, because he's left without a farm, without bread, without clothes, and he's lost his freedom.

We don't want anything, we'll give up our huts and home country, if they'd only give us permission to leave so we could go to industry. What's the point of us kicking the bucket in the kolkhoz from not eating?

Accounts submitted in the summer of 1932 report hot and dry weather. In a number of places crops perished, and in others low harvests resulted. There were reports that results were inflated, sown areas concealed, yields underestimated, that equipment frequently broke down, agricultural work was of low quality, kolkhoz fields were overgrown with weeds, harvesting was late, and, as a consequence, that losses in various places amounted to anywhere from 25 to 50 percent of the harvest. In Ukraine, it was reported, losses were aggravated by combine operators' low level of competence. Because of the dry weather fires were occurring on a mass scale. They were often attributed to arson. From everywhere at once came reports about the appearance of "barbers," collective farm workers who, in order to subsist, were "dragging sheaves off the kolkhoz fields."[33]

The leadership regarded these occurrences as acts of destruction and sabotage. In August 1932 a law was passed to protect socialist property. It prescribed draconian punishments for theft of and

damage to state holdings: up to ten years' imprisonment, even the firing squad. Lists of "shirkers" designating kolkhozes, state farms, and raion organizations foiling projected plans found wide use. Extraordinary commissions were formed that took everything "down to the last straw" from kolkhoz grain barns, including seed depositories, in such grain-rich regions as Ukraine, North Caucasus, and the Volga region. There were wide-scale repressions against both peasants who did not fulfill planned grain deliveries and leaders unable to guarantee grain delivery procurements.

As a result, real famine broke out, taking millions of lives. The circumstances surrounding it are fully elucidated in fiction and in published source material. Described there are the various forms the "famine-scourge" of the winter and spring of 1932–33 acquired. All over the country hundreds of thousands of starving and impoverished peasants straggled, packing railroad stations and wandering about like phantoms in search of sustenance and alms. According to data found in the archives by N. A. Ivnitsky, toward the beginning of March 1933 OGPU agencies arrested 219,460 persons, for the most part peasants who had set out in search of a living. Of this number, 186,588 were sent back to where they had come from; the rest were brought to trial.[34]

Thanks in part to Mikhail Sholokhov's letters reporting the arbitrary exercise of power on the Don, the harassment of collective farm members, instances of torture, beatings, "swollen" and dying people, people "devouring not only fresh carrion but also destroying glanderous horses, and dogs and cats, even carrion that had been cooked down in tallow-producing shops which had no nutritional value," the Politburo passed a resolution in July 1933 acknowledging excesses in state grain procurement in the Veshin Raion.[35] Nonetheless, and despite Soviet scholars' silence on the subject, the famine long remained a source of popular bitterness, and among some Ukrainians was interpreted as the result of the regime's genocidal intent.

For peasants fleeing the hungry villages, Moscow and Leningrad were the most attractive destinations. Not surprisingly, these were the first cities to introduce limitations on the influx of new residents, or residential registration *(propiska)*, and in December 1932 an internal passport system was introduced with the intent of impeding mobility. In spite of this, people found ways of "settling in" and anchoring themselves in these cities. These included acquiring counterfeit passports, stealing ration coupons or purchasing them on the black market, entering into fictive marriages, and other techniques known to illegal immigrants the world over.

The adaptation process was not easy for the new workers. Instances of drunkenness, idling, damage to machine tools and equipment, and industrial injuries became more frequent as new personnel arrived. These transgressions were usually explained as kulak intrigues, as conscious efforts to hinder the building of socialism. A summary entitled "The Class Enemy in Industry," compiled for the central and local press by the Department of Press and Information of SNK SSSR (*Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov SSSR* [council of People's commissars of the USSR]) and STO (*Sovet Truda i Oborony* [labor and defense council]) in 1930 includes such facts of "sabotage" as shoddy production, wedges and tacks shoved into machinery, machinery with sand and glass shards in it, and damage to gears. "At the Makeyevka Pipe Factory during a period of severe cold, idlers and malingerers poured water on the rails so that the car and crane wheels spun and they could rest. No one did anything to oppose this."[36]

Old conflicts traditional to relationships in factories also revived. The following is an anonymous report about a conversation supposedly overheard in passing at the "Female Worker" *(Rabotnitsa)* Factory in Leningrad:

Document 25

Anonymous report of conversation at "Female Worker" factory, Leningrad, 1930. RGAE, f. 7486s, op. 1, d. 102, l. 212. Typed copy.

A couple of women workers talk to one another.

"Those damn bastards, they won't give you time off," says a weaver to her work pal.

"But where we are ain't so bad," says a young weaver wearing a red kerchief. "Not a single Komsomol member in our section, and when one shows up, we immediately make it hot for her." And, looking around nervously, she burst out into a shrill laugh.