

## Soviet Economy by Denise Henderson

### Grain harvest 'worst in years'

*Will the 50 million ton shortfall in grain harvested this year lead to a tightening of the Center's power?*

The Soviet harvest now being gathered "looks the worst in years," reported the London *Financial Times* on Aug. 2. The poor harvest, along with the country's chronic shortage of hard currency for importing grain, "is likely to force the U.S.S.R. to press the West for further credits for grain imports to avoid real hunger this winter."

By the end of July, says the *Financial Times*, 68 million tons of grain had been threshed in the U.S.S.R.—6 million less than last year—and drought has reduced produce per acre to about 10% less than last year. Sales of grain to the state are also lower than last year, and it is reported that many regions are hoarding grain for barter purposes later, rather than selling it to the state now.

This is creating a political situation which recalls the "scissors crisis" of the 1920s, when peasants hoarded grain and the cities starved.

"Are We Guaranteed a Slice of Bread," and "Throwing to the Winds: How Long Will We Lose Lion's Share of Harvest?" were the headlines of two recent articles in the Soviet press. The State Committee on Statistics, Goskomstat, has released its early figures for the harvest. In the Russian Republic, on average, a ton less of bread grain per hectare is being threshed, and in Ukraine, 5 million tons less of bread grain will be harvested this year than last.

All of this tends to confirm that the Soviet harvest will yield, at most, 180-190 million tons of grain, or 50 million tons less than last year, and

there is great concern that due to drought, lack of machinery, and lack of manpower, the figure might turn out to be even less.

These concerns have led to a deployment of Red Army motor battalions into the fields in various parts of the Russian Republic in particular, and to emergency decrees regulating the sale of the harvest in Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

The Russian Republic's two largest cities, Leningrad and Moscow, are already in a state of panic about whether there will be food for the winter. On July 30, Moscow All-Union Radio announced that "the headquarters for the harvest and the provision of Leningrad's people with vegetables . . . analyzed [the situation] and emergency measures to save the harvest were planned."

The Russian Republic is pulling out all the stops to guarantee deliveries of food. A mandatory food tax on delivery of grain to the state was introduced this year, and measures have been taken to encourage the sale of grain and potatoes in exchange for automobiles, refrigerators, washing machines, and television sets set aside for this purpose. The Russian Republic has also adopted a "resolution on a tax in kind . . . introduced to stop *kolkhozes* [collective farms] from hoarding grain in stores." The tax is 30.8 million tons of grain, and, reported the newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, "Any shortfall in meeting the tax in kind carries the threat of a fine of five times the amount of the shortfall."

In Ukraine, a similar "carrot and

stick" approach is being taken, and there, too, consumer goods (refrigerators, video recorders, television sets, sewing and washing machines, automobiles) are being offered to peasants in exchange for the sale of grain to the state. But, warned Leonid Kravchuk, chairman of the Ukrainian Republic Supreme Soviet, "If need be, we will introduce a special regime in the Ukraine, because we are obliged to save the harvest we have cultivated and to provide the people with everything they need. We will go to any lengths to defend the interests of our population and our market."

In Kazakhstan, severely hit by drought, no such "carrots" have been offered. There, President Nursultan Nazarbayev issued an emergency decree and set up a 17-member special commission, including the head of the Kazakhstan KGB and the Interior Ministry, "charged with extraordinary powers," including "the power to conscript every available man, woman, and child to bring in the harvest."

That decree was used recently to arrest several people who allegedly attempted to sell stolen grain on the market. Criminal proceedings have been initiated against them, and the grain has been confiscated.

Once the grain is in, the question will be whether the Soviet Politburo will find it necessary to issue further emergency decrees in order to fulfill state orders. Such decrees might very well be needed if Moscow, Leningrad, and other big cities are not to starve this winter—in which case, recent demands from communist hard-liner Yegor Ligachov and Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov for a tightening of the Center's power, could lead to conflict between communist loyalists and political forces who have demanded a more decentralized form of government within the framework of the "new" Union.