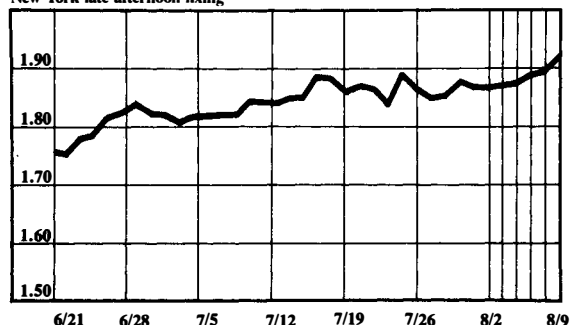


## Currency Rates

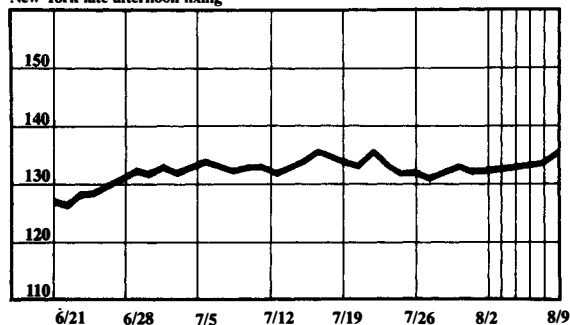
**The dollar in deutschmarks**

New York late afternoon fixing



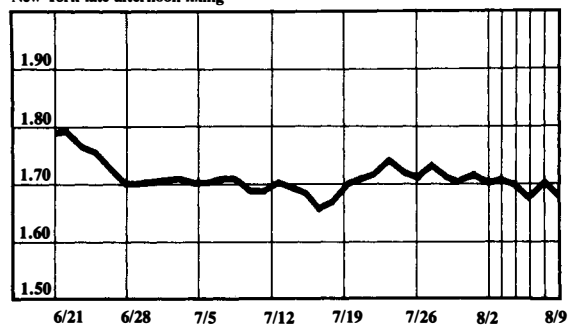
**The dollar in yen**

New York late afternoon fixing



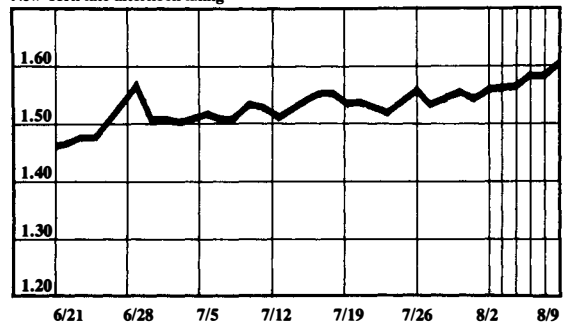
**The British pound in dollars**

New York late afternoon fixing



**The dollar in Swiss francs**

New York late afternoon fixing



# Food crisis was top at Moscow Central

by Luba George

A Soviet agriculture official tried Aug. 3 to encourage a widespread belief, that the U.S.S.R. was headed for a good harvest, without drought-related losses such as were suffered elsewhere in the world. Aleksandr Zholobov, a collegium member of the Soviet State Committee for the Agro-Industrial Complex (Gosagroprom) told the official news agency TASS, "Despite all weather deviations, there was no disaster anywhere."

Perhaps Zholobov was trying to create a smoke screen over the increasingly desperate Soviet and Eastern European demand for food imports. Whatever his motive, the activity of the Soviet leadership and the on-the-scene harvest reports in the Soviet press tell a very different story.

On July 29, the Soviet Communist Party held a Central Committee plenum, to deal with the economic crisis. The top item on the agenda was the Soviet *food* crisis. Half of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov's keynote speech concerned the need to overcome the continuing "acute shortages" of food and consumer goods and "difficulties in agriculture" afflicting the Soviet Union. This was dramatically conveyed by the Soviet media. After singling out shortages in "meat and fresh fruits," at one point in his speech, Gorbachov shouted, "Even in Moscow, where generally almost anything can be purchased—queues of people, everywhere!" According to Radio Moscow on July 30, the plenum adopted "measures," related solely to food, but these were not made public.

Regional agriculture reports, compiled from the Soviet press, indicate that even where there was a potentially good yield per acre this year, huge problems with weather, machinery, and infrastructure would make it impossible to bring in.

In Voronezh Oblast, or region, on the Don, for instance, *Izvestia* reported that "the harvest promised to be excellent, but continuous rains and winds have flattened 200,000 hectares of grain . . . and in eastern regions dry winds have parched the crops." In Lipetsk (south of Moscow) and Tambov (east of Moscow) Oblasts, *Izvestia* added, crops were hit with "continuous rains and winds."

During the month of July, extensive parts of the U.S.S.R. were hit with drought and heat spells, while other areas were devastated with torrential rains, causing damage to winter

# priority Committee plenum

grain crops which were fully ripe and ready to be harvested. The very hot and dry weather patterns were reported to have predominated in the agricultural zone of West Siberia, particularly in Tyumen and Omsk Oblasts, and also in the adjacent northern half of Kazakhstan. The Soviet Far East was hit with torrential rains, as was the Kuban Delta bread basket north of the Caucasus along the Black Sea, damaging much of its winter grain crop.

A field worker's eyewitness account of the Kuban disaster was given to the Russian Republic party newspaper, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*: "This was the first time in eight years' work that I have seen such raging elements. . . . In some 10 minutes . . . the wheat field had been mowed clean" by the rain and hail. "And how many such thunderstorms passed over the Kuban in June and July! Some 330,000 hectares of crops ended up under water, and crops perished on 100,000 hectares."

The Russian daily added that farms in Kurganinsky, Dinsky, Labinsky, and Mostovsky districts, and the Adyge Autonomous Oblast suffered in particular. An early August issue of *Selskaya Zhizhn* related that Soviet farmers are faced with "a race against time" to bring in the early harvest and salvage the crops.

During August, Moscow is the hottest city in Europe with temperatures higher than Athens and Rome and with a humidity of 90%. As one West German correspondent put it, "Moscow is turning into a boiling pot. Weather patterns are erratic throughout." In Leningrad, a tempest has caused such rains that all traffic in many parts of the city was halted because of floods. Even in Siberia, in Vekhoyansk, generally the coolest area in the summer, the temperature is up to 37°C (98.6°F). The very hot and humid weather has also caused plagues of insects in many places.

Soviet weather expert Mikhail Budyko, predicted 40°C (104°F) for the Moscow area in August.

Meanwhile the latest reports note that all across Siberia, there are raging forest fires. One of the centers of these fires is the Taiga at Khabarovsk on the Amur involving 103,000 hectares. The city of Khabarovsk is buried under a thick cloud of smoke. Whereas in the east of the Baikal, there are huge floods, which have already buried 75,000 hectares of land.

## Bad weather compounds food problem

In the Ukraine, long counted on as the "bread basket" of the Russian empire, storms were described as "unprecedented" by Radio Kiev on July 27. They destroyed crops and caused heavy damage to village dwellings and industrial installations in 13 districts of the Poltava Region, the area between Kharkov and Dnepropetrovsk. Even before the storms, the grain-producing area of Poltava, Sumy and Kharkov Oblasts (northeastern areas of the Ukraine) were hit with heavy rains. "On more than half the fields the heavy ears have been flattened against the ground. On the average at least 3 quintals of grain per hectare is being lost" reported *Izvestia* on July 22.

Also in the Ukraine, weather difficulties were compounded by disastrous breakdowns in deliveries of fuel for farm vehicles. *Izvestia* reported July 21 from Odessa Oblast, that "at the very height of the harvest, when every day and hour is precious, fuel, particularly diesel fuel, is running out." Diesel fuel also failed to arrive from suppliers in central Russia, the paper said, for agricultural customers in the southern Russian grain-growing regions of Stavropol Krai and the Kuban.

Shortly before the Moscow plenum, Radio Kiev reported that "severe food shortages" in Kharkov, the Ukraine's second largest city, were discussed at the regular session of the Presidium of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, adding that "sharp criticisms" were launched at Kharkov's city administrators "for serious neglect and deficiencies in providing city dwellers with foodstuffs and basic necessities."

News reaching the West indicates that certain parts of the Ukraine—with a population of over 50 million—are undergoing some of the worst food and *water* shortages seen since the war days. Shortages of baby food are so severe in some places that state authorities have been accused of "criminal negligence." Reports the *Radyanska Ukraina* of July 7, "Annual supply of sterilized milk for the Republic's population, calculated on the basis of one child of up to two years of age is at 1.6 kilogram, *kefir* [a fermented dairy drink] at 40 grams, and fruit juices at 440 grams. Yearly, that is!!!"

Growing shortages in food and basic necessities are causing panic in the Soviet population. The weekly *Moscow News* reported on "panic in Novosibirsk" and "hoarding of food." People of this Siberian city are practically buying up everything in sight, including such basic necessities as butter, soap, salt, etc.

And when food *is* available—city centers like Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev relatively have more goods available than the provinces—fewer and fewer people can afford to buy it. In a recent issue of *Argumenti i Fakti*, a comparison of food prices in Moscow with European cities was made showing that the price of meat in Moscow was 40% higher than in New York; lettuce 50% higher than in New York, Paris, Montreal; and cars cost 400% more than Japan and 200% than New York.