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THE WORKDAY THAT HELPED TO SAVE THE SOVIET KOLKHOZES I HAVE MANY COUPLETS TO SING, AND EVEN MORE WORKDAYS (FROM THE REPERTOIRE OF M. MORDASOVA, A SOLOIST OF THE VORONEZH PEOPLE’S CHOIR, THE USSR PEOPLE’S ARTIST)

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Abstract

In this year, it is exactly 50 years after the kolkhoz (collective farm) workday was abolished in the Soviet Union. The author doubts the N.S. Khrushchev’s thesis that “...the kolkhoz workday cannot be acknowledged a right and objective measure of labor costs for production” in modern market environment that leads to the degradation of Russian villages. The article justifies more objective evaluation of the workday as a measure of quantity and quality of the kolkhoz members’ labor and a way to stimulate it, especially since the Soviet kolkhozes outlived the abolition of the workday (which played an important role in the agricultural policy of the country from 1930 to 1966) for a little while.

Keywords

Interests and incentives – Cooperation and collectivization – Kolkhoz – Workday – Sovkhoz

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PH. D. SERGEY I. SHUBIN

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Introduction

We should admit a negative effect of the state monopolism on the development of agricultural sector of economy. However, at the beginning of the kolkhoz era, the workday was a very good mechanism to measure, pay, and stimulate the labor of a kolkhoz member. The notion of workday was first mentioned in the Agricultural Association Model Charter approved by the Resolution of the USSRCEC and CPC on April 13, 1930. Recommendations and specifications on calculating workdays were given in the special publication of Kolkhozcentr. The official date of establishing the workday is June 7, 1930.

Before speaking about the role of the workday in the development of kolkhozes, we would like to draw the reader's attention to such important socio-economic category as individual interest. Napoleon once said, "Men are moved by two levers only - fear and self-interest"¹. F. Hegel, the classic of philosophy, was more categorical, "The lack of interest is a spiritual or physical death"²

Marx had a very interesting statement in his Capital, "The only force that brings them [people] together and puts them in relation with each other is the selfishness, the gain and the private interest of each. Each looks for himself only and no one troubles himself with the rest, and just because they do so, do they all, in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of all-shrewd providence, work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal and in the interest of all"³.

I think that V.I. Lenin succeeded to go further and offered a real mechanism to balance private, collective and public interests through cooperation instead of the Marxist "all-shrewd providence" in respect of the peasant Russia. "All we actually need under NEP, wrote he in his article 'On Cooperation', is to organize the population of Russia in cooperative societies on the sufficiently large-scale, for we have now found the degree of combination of private interest, of private commercial interest, with state supervision and control of this interest, that degree of its subordination to the common interests, which was formerly the stumbling block for very many socialists"⁴.

Indeed, every healthy economy implies reasonable combination of interests: personal – collective – public. It can be illustrated by the history of Russia's development in the XX century. During so-called military communism, the surplus appropriation system in the peasant Soviet republic made people indifferent to the results of labor. The lack of individual (private) interest predetermined the failure of post-October communism. The new economic policy drastically changed the situation in the country, especially in the agricultural, peasant economy.

Materials and Methods

Apart from the freedom of private entrepreneurship, the cooperative movement played an important role during the NEP. It was quite and efficient mechanism to unite private and public interest and a way to join many private interests to the achievement of public goals

¹ Obshaya Teoriya Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti. Under general edition of A. A. Prokhozheva (Moscow: Izd-vo RAGS, 2002).

² G. W. Hegel, *Filosofiya Prava*. Moscow: 1990.

³ K. Marx, *Kapital Vol: 1*. Moscow: 1969.

⁴ V. I. Lenin, *Poslednie Pisma I Stati*. Moscow: 1989.

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through the team. Rural cooperation helped to satisfy the most various needs of population and thereby multiplied the well-being of personal, collective, and public economy. These processes were most developed in the North and Siberia, where peasants did not know any serfdom. Besides, the tradition of farming associations was completely in line with the principles of cooperation.

The collectivization drastically changed the economic system in the village. First of all, it violated the equivalent exchange between the society represented by the state and collective households. The state simply robbed the village and controlled the stores of the kolkhozes, following its own interests.

You may wonder how the system of kolkhozes survived and even developed after a certain crisis at the initial stage. Surely, the state monopolism had a negative effect. However, in my opinion, the very beginning of the kolkhoz era witnessed very effective mechanism to measure and pays the labor of the kolkhoz members. We are speaking about the WORKDAY as a single measure of the kolkhoz members' labor and income distribution. The notion of workday was first mentioned in the Agricultural Association Model Charter approved by the Resolution of the USSRCEK and CPC on April 13, 1930. Recommendations and specifications on calculating workdays were given in the special publication of Kolkhozcentr. The official date of establishing the workday is June 7, 1930.

First, the workday enabled to unite all the works regardless of traditional prestige under uniform and clear measure of costs and incentives of labor. Second, it destroyed wage leveling in distributing incomes. Third, filling the workday with kind or cash equivalent according to the results of the economic year enabled to develop the elements of collective cost accounting and responsibility for the ultimate result. Forth, the workday was completely in line with the Russian mentality and the epoch of creating new social system based on labor enthusiasm rather than gain (see the epigraph). Fifth, the workday gave rural women an equal opportunity with men to be paid for their labor.

Stalin spoke about this at the meeting with women shock workers (female kolkhoz members who harvested 500 centners of beetroots and more from the hectare) on November 10, 1935, "The collective farm has liberated women by means of workdays. ...She no longer works for her farther when she is unmarried, but works primarily for herself. ...The collective farm system makes a woman the equal of any man..."⁵.

Thus, the workday kept incentives inside the kolkhoz and they still functioned, though in the form of serfdom. Valentin Vasilyevich Babikov from the Kirov Region describes the life in the kolkhoz before the war. "Before the war, the Novaya Zhizn (New Life, the name of the kolkhoz –S.Sh.) was prosperous – the workers received 8-10 kilograms of bread for a workday. Our family had three capable persons. They did 900 workdays a year and received seven tons of grain. The kolkhoz workers did not know what to do with the grain. They left it in the kolkhoz warehouses and took it while needed"⁶.

This is confirmed by the family chronicle of Vasiliy Nikitich Bashlovkin from Kesloma, a laborious Leshukoniya village. This work is based on archive documents, his memory, and memory of his parents. The collectivization in Kesloma had a specific feature: the commune with the most appropriate name –Krasnyi Sever (Red North) – gradually transformed into

⁵ J. V. Stalin, Works. Vol: 14 (Moscow: Pisatel, 1997).

⁶ V. V. Babikov, "Kto Skazal, Chto My Plokho Zhili?", Pensionerskaya gazeta, num 7 (2011)

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the kolkhoz. The Krasnyi Sever commune in Keslomawas created on September 28, 1929. People had various opinions about the commune in the village, but everything was quiet. Fifty-four households out of seventy-one joined the commune-kolkhoz during six months⁷.

Discussion

The members of the commune officially decided to rearrange it into the kolkhoz under the same name in 1935. However, the introduction of the workday enabled to end with the wage leveling as early as in 1931. Vasiliy Nikitich welcomes the introduction of the workday to measure the labor of the kolkhoz members and to distribute the kolkhoz incomes according to the ultimate result of collective work during the year. He calls the workday “responsible for the survival and further development of the kolkhozes”⁸. He confirms this evaluation by the documents on the filling of the workday of the Kesloma kolkhoz members based on 1940 results: “The average delivery per a workday was: cash – 1.516 rubles, grain – 1.435 kg, potato – 0.142 kg, cabbage – 0.111 kg, hay – 1.375 kg, straw – 0.938 kg. Thus, the household of my farther, Nikita Vasylyevich Baschlovkin (six persons in the family), had 1063.49 workdays per year and received: 335 kg of rye, 1191 kg of barley, 892 kg of sow thistle, 568 kg of hay, 905 kg of straw, 118 kg of cabbage, 157 kg of potato, 1612.25 rubles”. Besides, the kolkhoz additionally sold the production at the rates approved by the management⁹:

Production	Price for kolkhoz members	Price for other customers
Whole milk (liter)	1.00 ruble	1.50 rubles
Milk (liter)	13 kopeks	13 kopeks
Butter (kg)	18 rubles	24 rubles
Cottage cheese (kg)	1.00 ruble	1.50 rubles
Meat, the first sort (kg)	6 rubles	12 rubles
Meat, the second sort (kg)	5 rubles	10 rubles
Sheep wool (kg)	20 rubles	40 rubles
Eggs (1 piece)	50 kopeks	1.00 ruble
Fresh cabbage (kg)	40 kopeks	80 kopeks
Pickled cabbage (kg)	1 ruble	1.50 rubles
Pickled cucumbers (kg)	1.50 rubles	3.50 rubles
Carrot (kg)	50 kopeks	1.50 rubles
Onion (kg)	1.00 ruble	2.50 rubles
Potato (kg)	25 kopeks	50 kopeks
Fish caught by the kolkhoz members (big, kg)	4 rubles	8 rubles
(middle, kg)	2 rubles	5 rubles
(small, kg)	80 kopeks	1.50 rubles
Flatfish (big, kg)	2 rubles	5 rubles
(small, kg)	1 ruble	2.50 rubles
Pork (kg)	8 rubles	16 rubles
Chicken (kg)	5 rubles	10 rubles

Table 1

⁷ V. N. Bashlovkin, Bashlovkiny iz Leshukoni i Rodoslovnye Rospisi. Smolensk: 2014.

⁸ V. N. Bashlovkin, Bashlovkiny iz Leshukoni i Rodoslovnye Rospisi...

⁹ V. N. Bashlovkin, Bashlovkiny iz Leshukoni i Rodoslovnye Rospisi...

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The table from the Record No 16 of the kolkhoz management meeting of April 1941 is interesting in many respects. First, we should note that after the products had been distributed according to workdays, the kolkhoz still had a store of products that could be purchased. Second, there was quite an extensive range of produced and sold products. Third, the kolkhoz members had serious advantages in the price for products.

A peasant was supplied only from the kolkhoz store or kolkhoz booking office. His well-being was still dependent on the ultimate results of the household association work. Therefore, a peasant had to work hard just to survive.

The norms of output and rates for each work in workdays for all the agricultural works were developed by the management of each kolkhoz and approved by the general meeting of the kolkhoz members. These norms were based on the recommendations of the Kolkhozsentr. The work was evaluated in workdays according to the required qualification of a worker and complicity and importance of the work for the kolkhoz.

All the work performed by a kolkhoz member was calculated. The advances and final distribution of incomes in both kind and cash equivalent between the kolkhoz members was carried out only according to the number of worked days. In 1936, the average output for a kolkhoz household was 393 workdays, while in 1939 this output increased up to 488 workdays. In 1936, 88.1% of kolkhozes produced 3 kg of grains per workday, 8.0% – from 3.1 to 5.0 kg, 2.4% – from 5.1 to 7.0 kg and only 1.5% – more than 7.0 kg. In the fruitful 1937, less than 3.0% – 50.6%, from 3.1 to 5.0 kg – 26.4%, from 5.1 to 7.0 kg – 12.8% and only 10% produced more than 7.0 kg. In 1939 (the unfruitful year), less than 1.0% (more than 700 gr) – 35.9%, from 1.0 to 3.0 kg – 47.4%, from 3.1 to 5.0 kg – 9.4% and only 4.4% produced more than 5.0 kg, while 4.4% of kolkhozes did not give grain.

To strengthen labor discipline, the resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Bolshevik) and the USSR CPC of May 27, 1939 “Defending public lands of kolkhozes from dissipation” among other things established obligatory minimum of workdays for able-bodied kolkhoz members – 100, 80 and 60 workdays – depending on territories and regions.

The kolkhoz members who did not perform the minimum of workdays (without good cause) had to be excluded from the kolkhoz, deprived of their private plots and advantages for kolkhoz members. During the war, the obligatory annual minimum of worked days was increased and reached 150, 120, and 100 workdays for various territories and regions (by groups) depending on environment and climate. Besides, there was an additional payment for higher production of crops and livestock.

The regulation of April 13, 1942 raised the annual minimum of workdays and established some minimum of workdays for kolkhoz members for each agricultural period to perform various agricultural works. Thus, the kolkhozes of the first group with the minimum of 150 workdays a year required to do no less than 30 workdays up to May 15, no less than 47 workdays from May 15 to September 1 and no less than 45 workdays from September 1 to November 1. The rest 30 workdays had to be done after November 1.

During the war, there was a minimum for adolescents too. The regulation required that adolescents aged 12-16 from the kolkhoz members families had to do no less than 50 workdays a year, though without division on periods. This contributed to the labor upbringing of adolescents, enabled them to both work and study and reduces the juvenile delinquency.

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The decree of the Presidium of USSR Supreme Council of April 15, 1942 implied that persons guilty in failure to do the obligatory minimum in periods were punished by up to 6 months of hard labor in the kolkhoz with the holdback of up to 25% of workdays. However, the Decree offered to hold these percent in favor of the kolkhoz instead of the state. This decision enabled the kolkhoz not to hide this information and better supply the needed people from these funds. The Decree made only able-bodied persons responsible for failure to do the obligatory minimum of workdays.

The order of the USSR Commissar of Justice of July 4, 1942 prohibited the courts to take cognizance of the cases on criminal responsibility for failure to do the obligatory minimum of workdays, if there kolkhoz member were either men over 60 or women over 55 or adolescents younger 16. Therefore, the adolescents aged 12-16 from the kolkhoz members' families bore no responsibility for failure to do the minimum of workdays, though they had to do no less than 50 workdays per year.

So-called material incentives were supplemented by severe (though quite reasonable) administrative penalties. Probably, it would be difficult to defeat such a deadly enemy as fascism without this combination. The wage leveling that was gradually making the kolkhoz members uninterested in the final results of their labor was manifested in 1950s. In 1959, the authorities introduced a new wage system in kolkhozes. There was a man-day with cash payment. The workday was officially replaced by the guaranteed wage introduced by the resolution of the Central Committee of CPSU and the USSR Council of Ministers of May 18, 1966 "Increasing the material interest of kolkhoz members in the development of public production"¹⁰.

The refuse from workday was accompanied by the destruction of kolkhozes by transferring agricultural production into the property of the state. However, we got a complete fall of material incentive instead of its growth. Peasants received a guaranteed wage, which finally put a cross on their interest in the efficient work of the team.

Thus, an agricultural policy sentenced the agricultural economy to death by guaranteed wages and struggle against private households. The sovkhos (state farm) workers (the overwhelming majority in the Northern agriculture) got their wages for just showing up, irrespective of the ultimate result of the team—directly from the state.

Thus, there came the period of total indifference, and the lack of interest, as the great Hegel said, is a spiritual or physical death.

In fact, this simple scheme can be used not only in agriculture, but also in any other industry. We needed a huge bureaucratic apparatus to make a person work. It was developed in the time when people were passive and deprived from property by the state. That is why only a person "from the system" could make a career of an official. His intelligence, professionalism, and competence were of no use. A career promotion was largely dependent on the candidate's conformism, striving to please his superiors, external activity, personal loyalty, in one word, ability to follow the principle: OK, you are the boss. Many years of indifference to the results of labor in economics and a devastating impact of the nomenclature system in politics caused the degradation of both a worker and a manager.

¹⁰ The Regulation of the USSR Council of Ministers of May 13, 1967 "Increasing the Material Interest of Kolkhoz Members in the Development of Public Production", from: <http://www.bestpravo.ru/sssrf/eh-pravo/w9o.htm>

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In this situation, the perestroika was doomed to fail, and so-called transition to market economy (without a worker and a manager) finishes the collapse of the Russian economy, which is most clearly seen in the rural areas.

In our opinion, there was a chance to return the interests and incentives to the village at the period of corporatizing agricultural property. It was necessary to calculate so-called natural shares in cash. Besides, it was necessary to define the minimum of annual output, depending on which a worker-shareholder had larger or smaller (if he failed to do a certain minimum without a good reason) share in the capital stock.

The article by F.N. Zhiglei from the Altai Territory, a veteran of the agricultural labor and holder of an order, represented a kind of support for the simple mechanism of maintaining interest in labor in rural workers at the transitional period. It was published in the Pensionerskaya Pravda newspaper under the heading “Hope for Better Life Turned out a Deceit”. The author, being a shareholder during the corporatization of sovkhoz propriety, was well aware of the share’s size in cash (52748 rubles) and was ready do all his best to make it bigger. However, Fedor Nikitich writes that, in fact, people “were deceived again”¹¹.

The permanent and deep crisis of the Russian society is largely caused by poor business and moral qualities of people. We cannot get out of crisis if we do not make a laborer interested in the ultimate results of his work accounting for the interests of the team, region, and the entire society. V.E. Grum-Grzhimajlo, the prominent Russian metallurgist who arranged the domestic industry during the Soviet modernization, corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, wrote about it, “If there is neither heroic deed nor goal, the Russians degrade. They become idle and addicted to gambling and alcohol... People giving strict orders cannot be successful in Russia. The Russians are too undisciplined. Explain your goal to a Russian worker, and he will help you with all the enthusiasm...My officers, workers and masters always knew what I think, what I do, what I strive for, what makes me sad and what makes me happy...I will die with the faith in the Russian people whom I know by their deeds, not words”¹².

The stability and safety of the society and state at both internal and external level depend on the consolidation of private interests of individuals through the consolidation of the group interests with the common goal of the state. Unfortunately, our political establishment remembers about it only under the threat of losing power.

It turned out that the heroism of soldiers and officers during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) was not caused by pure patriotism. The field army offered differentiated and, most important, very clear incentives for the destroyed enemy machines, “Thus, destroyed German fighter cost 1000 rubles, air scout – 1500 rubles, bomber – 2000. The attack aviation pilots received 3000 rubles for 50 flights, the destroyed railway engine “cost” 900 rubles, and automobile – 600 rubles. The “rates” for German tanks was similar. Thus, the antitank detachment could earn 750 rubles by one tidy shot: the gun layer received 500, while his assistant – 250. An infantryman who destroyed a tank with a grenade or the Molotov cocktail received 1000 rubles. First, the holders of an order received payments too. But then, when the threat to power disappeared, the payment was abolished “by popular demand”¹³.

¹¹ F. V. Zhiglei, “Nadezhda na Luchshuyu Zhizn Obernulas Obmanom”, Pensionerskaya Pravda, num 1 (2011)

¹² M. P. Lobanov, Stalin v Vospominaniyakh Sovremennikov I Dokumentakh Epokhi. Moscow: 2008.

¹³ “Messer” za Butylku, Argumenty i Fakty, num 19 (2008).

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Everyone knows the success of S.N. Fedorov, the renowned ophthalmologist, in both medicine and his auxiliary agricultural enterprises near Moscow. This phenomenon could also be explained by the art to get people interested in the results of their work. I was lucky to visit the Fedorov eye clinic in Moscow with the group of the Pomor community from the Arkhangelsk Region.

Svyatoslav Nikolaevich gave the Northerners a warm welcome and explained his success by the following fact: each employee from the chief doctor to the cleaning lady knew their individual percent from the income of the clinic. In every office, the scrolling text informed how much the staff earned for today, and everyone could easily calculate his share of these common earnings. Svyatoslav Nikolaevich called this system of management the people's capitalism. Perhaps, that is why those who preferred to build oligarchic capitalism are responsible for his death. Recent fiasco of the Russian football team and success of the Islandic people's team on Euro-2016 proves the importance of the chosen way of development once again.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we should stress that the wisdom and genuine of the statesmen is reflected in the ability to create an efficient system involving personal, collective and public interests to increase the well-being of the Society. In this sense, the workday fulfilled its task. I think we can agree with the wise veteran, the author of the book "Bashlovkiny from Leshukoniya. Geneological paintings", who called the workday "responsible for the survival and further development of the kolkhozes survived and further were developed."¹⁴.

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