

Rural USSR

He observes that "rural migration performs the important progressive function of replenishing the labour resources of the towns," but it is beneficial only "as long as agricultural output continues to rise and the decline in the rural workforce is offset by an increase in the efficiency of the agricultural workers who remain."

Causes of inefficiency

That is clearly not the case in the Soviet Union. The factors responsible for the failure of the country's centrally-administered food production and distribution machinery include a commercially unjustifiable subsidy policy, wild fluctuations in agricultural investment following ruthless exploitation of the countryside, inefficiency stemming from cumbersome bureaucratic control and, most importantly, lack of faith by the peasants in the validity of the system. The ILO study is important because it provides an insight into the intense debate now taking place in the privacy of the Soviet Communist Party leadership over ways to overcome the persistent refusal of the countryfolk to make agriculture work.

According to the authoritative Soviet journal *Questions of Economics*, feed grain losses due to improper handling may be as high nationally as thirty percent. I.N. Buzdalov, an economist with the Soviet Academy of Sciences, has declared that the recently massive investment in Soviet agriculture was in his view unproductive because "profitability, efficiency and quality play virtually no role in the work of state and collective farms."

Khomolyansky describes, unusually frank for an essay intended for publication by a UN body, the reasons now causing millions of peasants to abandon the countryside. The problem is not new. During the years immediately following the Second World War, Moscow erected administrative barriers to restrict the migration, but many managed to circumvent them because, as the study admits, such intervention "does not really solve the problem." The administration later increased considerably the material pros-

to improving conditions of life in the countryside and for paying more attention to those aspects which have been neglected."

Improving rural living

He goes on to pinpoint areas of urgent concern. High on his list of priorities is housing, particularly private homes, which country people tend to prefer to high-rise apartment blocks. The study observes that recent building material shortages have hampered individual housing construction.

Consumer services, sports facilities, secondary schools and hospitals are also inadequate in rural areas, even when measured by Soviet standards. More pre-school establishments are needed, the study says, and the existing ones should be radically improved. Many kindergartens function at present only while work is progressing in the fields. The shortage of these facilities prevents mothers of young children from taking employment outside the home. Many rural settlements lack any kind of permanent infrastructure and the existing social clubs, libraries and other cultural facilities fail to satisfy the growing expectations of the agricultural labor force.

The study prescribes easier access for countryfolk to the cultural, educational, health, commercial and general services available in the towns. This would require intensive construction of new, all-weather roads. "The better their transport links," says Khomolyansky, "the more successfully the villages can develop and retain their inhabitants."

Great hopes are pinned on the speedy development of projected agro-industrial complexes with agglomerations which would have all the facilities provided in the towns. Villages nearby would gravitate economically and culturally to these centres. But the study warns that, unless "the rural population is stabilized and a significant increase is achieved in agricultural labour productivity, agro-indus-



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perity of farm workers by boosting wages and permitting private garden plots to supplement incomes. Yet the exodus has continued. A recent investigation conducted among the rural workforce and quoted in the present study provides an explanation of the motives fuelling the exodus. The majority of the respondents pointed to a higher standard of living enjoyed in urban areas. Other lures of town life included more free time, better services and better educational facilities. But only a small proportion cited higher pay as an incentive to leave the farms. The author concludes that the message is clear: there is "a need for an all-round approach

trial integration will be impracticable and the underlying social problems insoluble." It considers that the best way to keep Soviet countryfolk on the farms is through "a judicious orientation and state investment policy." That means that more public funds should be spent on strengthening the social and cultural infrastructures in the countryside. Stemming the exodus of rural people to the cities — a prerequisite for rescuing the present structure of Soviet agriculture — would thus depend on long-term efforts to meet the rising aspirations of an increasingly restive and sophisticated population. □