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Merl, Stephan

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Was Chayanov's concept of peasant agriculture under the Soviet rule realistic?

The emerging of the kulturniki in answer to the *Litsom k derevne* policy

S. Merl

Stephan Merl, DSc (History), Professor, Bielefeld University, Universitätsstr., 25, 33615 Bielefeld, Germany. E-mail: stephan.merl@uni-bielefeld.de.

Abstract. *Litsom k derevne* ('turning to the village') was a short and unjustly neglected episode of the Soviet history. This program of development combined socialist construction and industrialization with the further growth of peasant agriculture. It was adopted by the Party's CC-Plenum in April 1925 (although only for a short time), and designed by such agricultural experts as Chelintsev, Kondratiev and Makarov, i.e., it was close to Chayanov's vision. Some peasants reacted positively to this program: following the call of the Party, a group of *kulturniki* started to improve and rationalize farming 'in a cultural way' — with the agricultural research knowledge. The article aims to question the feasibility of the *Litsom k derevne* program in regard to two decisive changes in 1925–1927: the nearly total stop of the state financial support for agriculture, and the Party's return to the 'class war' in the countryside — against the imagined *kulaks*. The argument on the political alternatives mentions Chayanov's and his colleagues' statements to Molotov in October 1927. The author describes the state's first attention to agriculture and its basic problems in the early 1920s; how and why the New Economic Policy led to a different program of agricultural development — *Litsom k derevne* — which strongly revised the Bolsheviks' previous positions. The author identifies reasons for the failure of this program, and how changes in the industrialization strategy affected the political action in the countryside. For the feasibility of the *Litsom k derevne* program, the peasants active participation was decisive. The article considers the state measures for agricultural development, the desperate fight of the *kulturniki* against their discrimination, and the position of Chayanov and his school on this program and the chances of the 'working peasants'. In the conclusion, the author presents his findings: 1) The agricultural program *Litsom k derevne* did not have any alternatives after the political decision to support primarily industrialization; only the *kulturniki* as rather well-to-do peasants could increase agricultural production in such conditions due to their higher profitability and lower costs. Only political discrimination and the threat of expropriation could stop their efforts to dynamically develop their farms. Thus, there was no way to combine the Party's return to the 'class war' against the well-to-do peasants as '*kulaks*' with the *Litsom k derevne* program. The Party's internal fight for power had disastrous consequences not only for the *kulturniki* but also for the agricultural production and exports. 2) The author suggests to stop the fruitless debates on the 'class differentiation' of the peasantry and to focus on the real mid-1920s controversy: whether the growth of agricultural production and efficiency required agricultural expertise (by capable peasants and researchers) and the state financial support (for the needed institutions like cooperatives). Both points were the basic requests of Chayanov to Molotov in 1927. The Party leaders from Stalin to Brezhnev never understood that not only industry but also agriculture could be successful only with expertise and not just by command.

With the 100th anniversary of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the agricultural program *Litsom k derevne* also needs attention. There is hardly any special research on it in Russia. I looked in vain for any assessments in the recent Russian historiography (see, e.g.: Rossiiskie... 2021: 241-282). When studying the NEP and peasantry under Stalin, I examined the *Litsom k derevne* policy and its potential decades ago (see: Merl, 1981; 1985; 1990; 1993). In close connection with Viktor Danilov, Markus Wehner studied this policy (1998). His book based on the archives and, considers in detail the fight in the Party exploiting agricultural policy and the danger of the capitalist restoration without any real concern or interest in agriculture. He examines the positions of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture of the RSFSR (*Narkomzem*) of the agricultural experts involved in policy formulation and the position of the 'industrialization lobby', which allows to assess to what extent Chayanov and his school were engaged in designing the *Litsom k derevne* program and how they estimated the feasibility of this policy under the Party's political pressure and changes in the industrialization strategy.

The article is based primarily on the results of my research and reflections. In order to show who was standing behind the *Litsom k derevne* program and changes in the approach to agriculture between 1925 and 1927, I will use the information provided by Wehner. A shortcoming of his argument is that he supports too strongly the contemporary negative assessment of the agricultural experts against the 'industrialization lobby'.

The situation in agriculture in the early 1920s: Problems and perspectives

After the Revolution, the Bolsheviks had no feasible concept for agriculture. They tolerated the peasants' land redistribution — the demand in the electoral mandate of the Social Revolutionaries. Their own concept of socialist agriculture favored large-scale mechanized enterprises and required huge state investments to reconstruct agriculture on a new technological basis. As there were no such means in the foreseeable future, coexistence with small peasant farms for some time was inevitable. However, to support the mechanized agriculture, in the early 1920s, some agricultural concessions were given to German enterprises like Krupp to construct mechanized farms, which worked until 1933 (Schmieder, 2017).

Thus, the Bolsheviks had to provide a concept of how to work with the small-scale peasant farms after the estates disappeared. By *prodrazvestka* (procurement dictatorship), they aimed only at pro-

viding agricultural products to the cities and the Army — armed brigades expropriated agricultural ‘surpluses’ from the peasants. Under the ‘war communism’, markets were illegal, but the state ensured even to workers such poor rations, that black markets flourished to supply additional food for survival. After the end of the Civil War and the victory of the ‘Reds’, the peasantry no longer tolerated this approach, which led to rebellions and uprisings. Thus, there was an urgent need to integrate the peasants into the new Bolshevik state.

With the NEP and introduction of the tax in kind, in 1921, incentives to develop agricultural production returned. After delivering the tax, the peasants were allowed to freely market their surpluses. Although the NEP legalized markets, it did not provide the needed program for promoting agricultural production on the basis of peasant farms. Such a concept was presented only in 1925 in connection with the *Litsom k derevne* program.

After nearly a decade of the World and Civil War and the 1921–1922 famine, the Russian peasant farms were economically much weaker than before the Revolution. Hardly any implements were produced during the long war-time. Most rural households had land, but less than a half had the animal power and necessary implements to cultivate their land, especially in most grain-producing areas. Many peasants here depended on the lease of implements and working cattle from their neighbors. Redistribution of land and the division of larger households significantly leveled the land holdings and reduced the number of larger ones, which had a negative impact on agricultural production and its efficiency (Merl, 1981).

The development of peasant agriculture in the 1920s could have relied on the changes of Czarist agrarian policy, among them the Stolypin reform of 1906. This provided important preconditions. The abolishment of serfdom in Russia was not — as in most European countries — connected with a reform of agricultural production. Only Stolypin provided such a program — a milestone for the agricultural modernization in Russia. Many criticized its focus on giving property rights to peasants but ignored other aspects more important in the long run. The increasing number of heads of peasant farms understood the need for improving their farming. Many were ready to follow recommendations of specialists, some asked for land improvement and consolidation (Merl, 2020).

The Czarist state recognized that financial support was crucial for developing peasant agriculture. In 1904, the Ministry of Finances copied Prussia with the *Preußenkasse* — provided loans for strengthening the capital stock of newly founded agricultural credit cooperatives. The basis for agricultural research institutions and training agricultural specialists was created. The state supported financially land regulation and consolidation, including *khutors* and *otrubs*.

Chayanov mentioned these results when asking the Soviet state for support: between 1905 and 1914, nearly every second rural household

joined a credit cooperative. These cooperatives often provided credits and supplied their members with improved seeds and agricultural machinery. Some peasants started to deposit their small savings in the banking system: peasants' deposits in banks and credit cooperatives reached impressive 632 million rubles in 1912 and 928 — in 1914 (Merl, 1981: 195; Merl, 2013). For overcoming rural underemployment in the most densely populated areas in the Central Black-Earth region, significant means for resettling peasant farms to Siberia were implemented.

The Soviet state could rely on this preliminary work to support peasant agriculture. Some agricultural specialists were available — land surveyors, agronomists, and veterinaries. With the established agricultural research institutions, Soviet Russia had agricultural experts, and Chayanov and his group were acknowledged by the international research community. In their ideological blindness, the Party leaders lacked the understanding to what extent they were the heirs of valuable 'academic capital'. Instead of using it, they attacked it ideologically. Moreover, poor payment made many agricultural specialists leave the countryside for other occupations in the cities.

A severe problem inherited from the time before the Revolution was the rural overpopulation which became more acute in the 1920s, as many side-offers for seasonal or migrant work in industry or crafts were lost. Moreover, the population growth continued: every year additional 3 million rural people were looking for job. Due to the lack of job opportunities, many rural households could not make productive use of their available labor. In the 1920s, about 80% of the Soviet population lived in the countryside, i.e., about four rural households had to provide one non-rural household with food. The low demand for food hindered investments to improve and increase agricultural production. In order to get a decent income, and profits from investments and efforts to intensify agricultural production, the ratio had to be reversed. The experts' calculation revealed how dramatic the situation with the hidden unemployment in the mid-1920s was: 10 million able-bodied persons were not needed for rural agricultural and handicraft production, which was equal to the total number of employees or workers outside agriculture (Merl, 1993: 270–276). Any rapid mechanization of agriculture would only exacerbate this problem by reducing the agricultural labor demand. When explaining in 1927 why the Five-Year-Plan presupposed a small supply of machinery to agriculture, Strumilin mentioned the fear that an increase in machinery supply would set free more labor, thus, aggravating agricultural overpopulation (Wehner, 1998: 331).

Soviet agriculture in 1924: Urgent need for policy's changes

Instead of directly changing their approach to agriculture, in 1919, after the end of the Civil War, in order to provide incentives for

peasants to increase their production, the Bolsheviks in the spring sowing campaign of 1920 strengthened the state control over agriculture by collecting the seed grain by village (Merl, 1993: 101–110). This policy failed. In addition to weather, the famine was caused by the exhaustion of the agricultural productive forces during the political conflict between the peasants and Soviet power (*prodrazverstka*). When the Party finally decided to introduce the NEP in early 1921, it was already too late to prevent the famine of 1921/1922. It hit most severely the Volga area and the Urals, where the conflicts between Bolsheviks and peasants were especially violent and stopped only under the famine (Merl, 2017). While the long war period had reduced the peasants' animal traction power by only about 10%, during the famine in the Volga region about a half of the working cattle died, and this damage was not overcome until the late 1920s. Famine in the Volga region persisted until 1923. The poor harvest of 1924 determined a new wave of famine (Wehner, 1998: 128–129; 226–227). During the 1920s, the traditional high grain surpluses in the Volga area therefore were missing.

The political turn to the NEP in 1921 started from trade and taxes. Lenin's cooperative plan provided the possibility to overcome the Party's fear of the capitalism restoration by the assumed 'petty-bourgeois nature' of peasant production (Krebs, 1983). This plan was based on the Marxists' conviction that agricultural cooperatives could never break out of the political system. However, this meant that after establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, cooperatives would not break out of the control of the state economic command, which provided the ideological background for the policy *Litsom k derevne*: to avoid a capitalist restoration starting from the countryside, it was considered necessary to organize peasant cooperatives, which was close to Chayanov's vision. He believed that the working peasants would understand advantages of cooperation and voluntary join cooperatives to profit from their help in intensification of farming based on agricultural knowledge. Chayanov was convinced that cooperatives — crucial for the Bolsheviks — would allow to direct and control peasant accumulation.

In 1924, the recovery of agriculture from the famine of 1921/22 was still insufficient. The harvest of 1924 was poor and worse than in 1922 or 1923. Even more alarming was the political mood of the peasants: dissatisfaction arose from the fact that the Party paid attention only to workers and ignored the needs of the peasants. As a result, there was a demand to organize a peasant union as a special lobby for representing peasant interests. The local election in the fall of 1924 revealed that the peasants did not consider rural soviets as representing their interests. On the average, only 29% of the peasants took part in the election, mostly communists, and often no peasants were elected to rural soviets (Merl, 1981: 41–49; Wehner, 1998: 171–172).

In changing the Party's attitude to agriculture two questions were crucial: organization of peasant cooperatives and (temporary) revision of the 'kulak question'.

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Was Chayanov's concept of peasant agriculture under the Soviet rule realistic?

Return to true cooperatives

With nationalization, the war communism policy turned cooperatives into state organizations no longer under the control of their members. However, in the early 1920s, many people still remembered cooperative organizations and their help before 1914: credits to overcome usury, improved farm inputs and machinery at reasonable prices, processing and marketing of agricultural products. The first step to revive agricultural cooperatives for peasant demands was made in August 1921 — the Soviet government expected from it some contribution to capital accumulation. The first All-Union congress of agricultural cooperatives decided to establish *Tsentrosoyuz* as a central union. Chayanov was elected in its board (Merl, 1981: 146). In 1922, agricultural cooperatives based on the Raiffeisen or Schulze-Delitsch principles formally were licensed. But the expectation that credit cooperatives would work on membership shares and deposits did not take into account the impoverishment of the peasants. In 1922, only 347 credit cooperatives were registered. It was necessary to finish first the money reform in early 1924 — to ensure the possibility of establishing true cooperatives. The Central State Bank for Agriculture was established (Merl, 1981: 141–148, 194–205).

The CC-Plenum on March 31 — April 2, 1924, and the 13th Party Congress on May 23–31, 1924, provided the basis for 'true cooperatives'. The resolutions mentioned voluntary joining, members' advantages and peasant deposits. However, these principles were followed only until mid-1926, when the Party restarted the nationalization of cooperatives (Merl, 1981: 141–284). The CC-Plenum and the 14th Party Conference in April 1925 went even further by promising the free development for cooperatives.

The Politburo discussed the reform of cooperatives on January 3, 1925. Kaminsky (*Selskosoyuz*) emphasized the financial and political problems of cooperatives despite the resolutions of the Spring 1924. Often such basic rules as voluntary membership and free elections of the executive body were violated. Kaminsky criticized the ban introduced by the Council of the People's Commissars (SNK) in the end of 1923 — not to include *kulak* farms. He stated that to include *kulaks* would be preferable even for the state control. He explained the lack of financial resources in cooperatives by the poverty of the peasants. Smirnov noticed that fearing *kulaks* was ridiculous. Kamenev and Bucharin proposed to introduce free elections in cooperatives. Stalin

agreed with these proposals, but he kept the traditional enemy picture and did not approve Smirnov's proposal to allow *kulaks* to take the cooperatives' executive positions (Wehner, 1998: 206–210). The 14th Party Conference confirmed the support for agricultural cooperatives: agrarian policy was to strengthen them to provide incentives for peasants to start accumulation in the fight against rural poverty and backwardness.

Behind the proposal to accept the well-to-do peasants was the desire to open up new sources of capital for the state. In his letter sent on Stalin's request to the CC-Secretariat, Kaminsky required state credits for the capital stock of cooperatives for the next ten years, which would help to overcome one of the key problems of cooperatives. Previously confiscated property was to be returned to them. The commission of 32 members (mostly practitioners) was formed to prepare proposals to the CC-April-Plenum and the 14th Party Conference in 1925. The commission members' views differed: Kaminsky and Sadyrin proposed to start with credit but not to restrict cooperation to credit. Before 1914, credit cooperatives had often served successfully as 'universal' — starting supplying farm inputs and selling agricultural products. On the contrary, Smirnov required to start cooperation with production and processing and opposed the 10-rubles membership fee. Rykov as the head of the commission presented the results to the Party Conference. He stated, which was close to Chayanov's position, that cooperatives would become one of the levers to direct pre-capitalist and partly capitalist peasant modes of production into socialism. For this, it would be necessary to start with trade rather than nationalization of production. The collective organization of the peasantry could start only after ensuring a higher technological level of production (Wehner, 1998: 211–215).

Kulak or kulturnik

To bring the *Litsom k derevne* program and the Party's class approach together, the crucial point was to understand the nature of the well-to-do peasants. The Party's traditional enemy picture described the *kulak* as a household exploiting others, based on trade, usury and hired labor. The new type of the well-to-do (working) peasants was totally different — it relied mainly on own work, use of scientific knowledge and investments in intensifying farming. This type of farmer was urgently needed for the Soviet agricultural production — to increase yields and make the labor input more efficient. Those running their farms in a 'cultural way' were called *kulturniki*.

Kalinin made the first attempt to revise the term *kulak* at the CC-Plenum in March/April 1924. He denied that the 'class war' in the countryside intensified: on the contrary, differentiation led to the increase in production. Therefore, no pressure should be allowed in or-

der not to endanger agricultural recovery. As his position was against the Stalin's, Kalinin, afraid of conflicts, withdrew his proposal (Wehner, 1998: 157-159). In 1925, Bogushevsky in the 'Bolshevik' required to adapt the definition of the *kulak* to the new conditions under Soviet rule (Merl, 1993: 214-221). Kolesnikov stated that a clear distinction between well-to-do peasants and *kulaks* had lost sense: most well-to-do were loyal to the Soviet power. He suggested they could be named 'farmers' (Merl, 1981: 424-427).

The *Narkomzem* protested against presenting peasants as 'exploiters'. When Svidersy returned from his journey to the Volga, he declared that *kulaks* existed only in the resolutions of the 13th Party Congress but not in the villages. At the beginning of 1925, the Politburo temporarily changed its position. Smirnov declared that even the peasant who employed seasonal workers was not *kulak*. In January 1925, Kalinin explained that the material well-being had nothing to do with the term *kulak*. In the *Izvestiya* of March 21, 1925, he declared that the destruction of the peasant bourgeoisie and handicrafts had impoverished broad peasant groups; therefore, 'peasant accumulation' was necessary. Other speakers required to distinguish 'ambitious and cultural' peasants from *kulaks*. Bucharin with his call "get rich" to the peasants, suggested to stop blaming kulaks (Wehner, 1998: 205-206). The village correspondents met by Molotov in 1927, disagreed with the suggestion that the number of *kulaks* grew quickly, and reported that in many places, there were absolutely no *kulaks* (Wehner, 1998: 349).

By the way, Chayanov's organization-production school considered as the basis for the peasant differentiation demographic factors, thus, opposing the Marxist idea of unavoidable class differentiation. Chayanov's school considered peasants (including the *kulturniki*) as working (*trudovye*) peasants and believed that the majority of peasants on their path to 'farmers' would organize in cooperatives and, thus, start a non-capitalist agricultural development.

Thus, all debaters agreed that *kulaks* had lost importance for the Soviet countryside — the majority of peasant farms earned income by their own work, like the capitalist farmers in the USA. But the debaters used different terms for the 'new peasants': Chayanov preferred the term 'fermer' for Russian peasants on their way to 'capitalist farmers' in the future. The media and most Party members used the term '*kulturniki*': 'working' peasants (of any size or welfare) running their farms culturally — with agricultural research knowledge, eager to improve and intensify their farming by investments, i.e., they were not 'capitalist' farmers. Sometimes the term *intensivnik* was used, in general with the same meaning as *kulturniki*. I can only guess why Chayanov used the term 'fermer'. The *kulturniki* existed in the Soviet countryside as 'working' peasants. Chayanov expected that they would not become (capitalist) farmers, if they could be brought on a non-capitalist path by cooperation. I will use the term *kulturnik* —

the new peasant active in the mid-1920s, whether or not he might become in some distant future a ‘capitalist farmer’.

For the Party leadership, to stop the stigmatization of the well-to-do peasants as *kulaks* would mean to lose a well working enemy picture in political agitation to mobilize workers and to intimidate the masses of the peasants from becoming ‘rich’. Without this enemy picture, Stalin would not have been able to send from 1928 workers to the countryside to confiscate grain and to intimidate rural communities in order to force them to create collective farms (Merl, 1990). To increase agricultural production and exports, there was no other alternative than to accept that there were no more *kulaks* and that it was necessary to support ‘new peasants’.

Decision to start the Litsom k derevne program

The change in the Party’ approach to the peasants started in the spring of 1924. The 13th Party Congress focused on the peasant question, and Zinoviev was the main speaker. The Congress decided to expand the Party presence in the villages, to intensify the contact and dialogue with the peasants. By establishing the *Krestgazeta* in November 1923, the Party started to address the peasants directly and to provide them with a forum for discussion. In a similar way, *Smychka* was established in 1925 — for debates on cooperation. The number of letters to the *Krestgazeta* increased from 250,000 in 1924 to 700,000 in 1927, and then strongly reduced in 1928 (Merl, 1981: 42–43).

The term *Litsom k derevne* was first used by Grigory Zinoviev in the *Pravda* editorial on July 30, 1924 (Wehner, 1998: 188). According to Wehner, the poor harvest of 1924 as threatening with famine played a significant role in attracting the Party leaders’ attention to the miserable situation in the countryside. They started to realize the failure to include the peasants into the soviets. The hunger relief commission was formed under the leadership of Rykov. Party delegations were sent to the countryside. Their members noticed that the yields in the areas affected by the harvest failure sometimes differed: high yields in village communes using progressive methods of cultivation and low yields in other communes. This convinced Rykov that the elementary agronomic knowledge would increase production (as argued by the *Narkomzem*). “The visual lesson from the villages around the Volga made the employees of the official government institutions aware of the situation. This contributed to their proposals for the reform of the agricultural policy” (Wehner, 1998: 166).

The CC-Commission for the Party work in the countryside, headed by Molotov since April 2, 1924, played an important role in changing the Party’s agricultural policy. In September 1924, the commission was transformed into a larger ‘committee for the work in the countryside’ consisting of 27 sub-committees. However, the main de-

cisions were made by the Politburo and Council of Labor and Defense (STO). Zinoviev's speech at the CC Plenum in 1924 (October 25–27) played a central role. He attacked the arbitrariness and corruption of the village officials, the not-free elections to the soviets, and the election of communists in the village soviets under pressure. He stressed the lack of the Party's interest in the peasant question. He demanded that the non-Party peasants represent the peasant interests in the village soviets and be included in the central authorities and local soviets (Wehner, 1998: 188–189). In 1925, 7454 peasants were included in local and central authorities and cooperatives (Wehner, 1998: 198).

When the *smychka* of peasants and workers was not achieved, the CC-Plenum on October 25–27, 1924, examined and revised the rural soviets' work, and demanded the integration of peasants in rural soviets, and the opening of the Party for peasants. Thus, rural decision-making was to be transferred from the *schody* (of the peasant community) to the local rural soviets which were to become the center of political life in the countryside¹. An important step to this was to cancel elections to the rural soviets in all places with less than 25% of the peasants participating in voting or with no peasants elected (December 29, 1924). The first positive reaction to the *Litsom k derevne* policy was the significantly higher participation of the peasants in the second elections to the rural soviets in 1925: much more peasants were elected to rural soviets. Although this meant that less Party members were elected, the Party declared this was a success, and some middle peasants joined the Party (Merl, 1981: 43). The leading Party members were sent for weeks in the countryside. When they returned, among others Molotov and Andreev reported their impressions: peasants were not anti-Soviet but complained about local arbitrariness (Wehner, 1998: 196–198).

Basic measures of the program *Litsom k derevne*

After the start of the *Litsom k derevne* program in 1924, its last and decisive step was made only at the beginning of 1925. The program focused on the challenges of the Soviet agricultural development and suggested reasonable implementable solutions. The core task was to intensify agricultural production and to overcome the rural underemployment. The program aimed at stimulating the working (middle)

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1. This was achieved only by force in the early 1928. In the fall of 1927, the CC withdrew the voting rights of *kulaks* in the village gathering (*skhod*) (Wehner, 1998: 321). In the early 1928, the peasants were forced to vote for a centrally ordered 'local self-taxation' (35% of the agricultural tax). Thus, the local self-administration of the *skhody* was transformed into an institution controlled by the state officials and secret police, no longer representing the peasants' free will (Merl, 2012: 64–68; Merl, 1993: 453–482).

peasants to create jobs by developing and intensifying their agricultural and craft production. The state financial support would provide incentives to introduce such methods of farming as scientific crop rotation and improved seeds, introduce expert consultations, financial support by credits, supply of (imported) equipment and machinery. For developing agricultural production and increasing its efficiency, the program followed many measures of the Stolypin reform, including land consolidation.

As the Party lacked qualified experts, the scientifically based agricultural program *Litsom k derevne* was developed by the (non-communist) agricultural experts working in the *Narkomzem*. In the *Zemplan*, Kondratiev and Oganovsky had designed the guidelines for the agricultural policy in the first Five-Year-Plan since the early 1920s. They formulated such basic targets as intensification and structural change of agriculture to promote capital accumulation, market orientation and exports (Wehner, 1998: 384). To strengthen the *Narkomzem's* expertise, Smirnov contacted Chayanov and Kondratiev who convinced Makarov (emigrated to the USA) and Chelintsev (Prague) to return to Soviet Russia — their expertise was declared necessary for 'industrialization of agriculture'. Thus, Wehner (1998: 230–231) considers the *Zemplan* in the mid-1920s the highly qualified think tank.

Kondratiev, Makarov and Chelintsev represented the *Narkomzem* in the *Gosplan*. Based on their expertise, the *Zemplan* designed the structural reform of the Russian agriculture as its 'industrialization', i.e., construction of a network of small and middle-size processing plants for raw materials, mechanization and electrification of agricultural production. These plants were to be built in the countryside to produce industrial crops and make animal husbandry more attractive for the peasants (Wehner, 1998: 231). The emphasis was made on intensifying rather than mechanizing agricultural production, as the later could exacerbate the rural underemployment (see, e.g.: Merl, 1981, 278–279; Chayanov, 1925b).

Kondratiev's first draft for the agricultural Five-Year-Plan in the summer of 1924 aimed at increasing agricultural production and marketing. Collectivization would start only when the development potential of the peasant economy was exhausted. The *Gosplan* accepted the plan in March 1925 (Wehner, 1998: 245–248). As the (relatively) well-to-do peasants had to play a decisive part, the experts opposed the high progressive taxation for them. Litoshenko demanded to stop the class tax policy: the tax burden on the peasants was already four times higher than on workers, and tax progression affected primarily the best farmers (Wehner, 1998: 231–232).

The CC Plenum on April 23–30 and the 3rd Soviet Congress in May 1925 adopted the program. To implement it, the tax reduction for *kustari* and rural handicrafts was decreed in April 1925. On the April Plenum, Molotov proposed to extend the right of land lease and hired labor, and to import tractors. He agreed with supporting not only poor

but also middle peasants. However, he warned that the widening of market relations would contribute to the escalation of the 'class war'. He criticized the 'peasant friendly' policy of the *Narkomzem* and questioned the expertise of the People's Commissar Smirnov (Wehner, 1998: 233). Kalinin and Yakovlev stressed the still low technical level of agriculture. Yakovlev warned that a wrong price policy would hinder the growth of industrial crops and animal production. Kalinin required to clearly define the *kulak* (Wehner, 1998: 219–221). While emphasizing the support to all peasant farms, the resolution added a new element: all 'working' peasants were to be supported as pioneers of the progressive land cultivation, and no administrative measures were to be used against free trade and a growing bourgeois stratum (Wehner, 1998: 225–227).

Kamenev, the head of the STO, presented the new agrarian program to the 3rd Soviet Congress, and it was accepted on May 20, 1925. The above-mentioned projects were a part of the *Zemplan's* perspective plan. Kamenev stated that the land nationalization, foreign-trade monopoly, state price regulation, and proletariat's leading position should not be questioned (Wehner, 1998: 222–223).

For providing incentives for working peasants to accumulate, land lease and hired labor were legalized. To keep them under the state control, contracts were to be registered by the local authorities. Incentives and benefits were promised to peasants willing to invest in agriculture or *kustar* industry. Improved methods of field cultivation and animal husbandry were to be promoted with favorable credits. Agricultural cooperatives were to get the state support to develop processing, storage and sales of agricultural products. However, the Party leadership insisted on not admitting *kulaks* to the executive bodies of cooperatives. In July 1925, the CC-Presidium decided to provide special financial funds for supporting the resettlement in less-populated regions and for reconstructing agriculture in regions hit by droughts or a structural crisis due to overpopulation, such as the Volga Region and the Central Black-Earth Region (Wehner, 1998: 225–227).

The *Litsom k derevne* program called the peasants to accumulate in order to create jobs in agriculture, which was connected with the plan of industrialization: designed to be bases on modern technologies, industrialization was to be capital- rather than labor-intensive. Therefore, in the next years it would create few jobs for the unskilled labor from the countryside. Thus, the urgently needed new jobs — to reduce the peasant poverty — were to be created in the countryside by peasants willing to accumulate in agriculture or crafts industry (Merl, 1981: 47–49). Strumilin calculated that even if the state had invested in such labor intensive branches as irrigation and transport, only 3 million workers — just an annual population growth — would have got jobs. He saw no possibility to reduce the rural labor surplus in the next years. The fact that primarily the well-to-do (work-

ing) peasants would profit from these measures was not considered a problem as long as the banks were controlled by the proletariat state. To ensure an efficient support of the poor peasant, the program suggested a temporary dependency on the well-to-do peasants developing their economic activities (Merl, 1981: 40–49; 1993: 144–176).

However, the key elements for implementing the *Litsom k derevne* program were missing: data on financing, a set of deadlines, guidelines to implement projects: the request for resettlement was much higher than the provided means; the financing of agriculture in relation to the tasks was behind the needs, and financing was not supported by the *Gosplan* and *Narkomfin* (Wehner, 1998: 223–224, 233–237).

Litsom k derevne program in 1925–1927: The change in the industrialization strategy and the return to the class war in the countryside

According to Wehner, the change in the Party's perception of the peasants was determined by the model of industrialization. In the beginning of 1925, the Party and government believed that the agricultural development would ensure a fast economic growth. The industry was still weak; therefore, agriculture was to play a decisive role in the capital accumulation (as before 1914) by providing goods for export and making bank deposits. Rykov stated that land consolidation could be finished in a few years (Wehner, 1998: 217–218). Today, the expectations of industrialization to be based on the previous accumulation of capital in agriculture do not look realistic, which was declared in the 'industrialization debate' (Erllich) already in the second half of 1925. As industry develops quicker than agriculture, the period to finish industrialization with the 1925 strategy would have been too long and would have made industrialization totally dependent on the world market of agricultural products (the global economic crisis of 1929 would have determined the failure of this strategy).

It is important not to confuse the economically well-thought position of the industrialization lobby with the Party's return to the class policy. The Party leaders relied on tactical reflections and political-power calculations. They had little knowledge (and interest) of facts (Wehner, 1998: 383–384). Closer to reality was only Preobrazhensky stating that the co-existence of petty capitalist farmers with socialist industry was possible. He demanded to take a 'tribute' for industrialization from the peasants, which was criticized by Rykov and other Party members without economic reasoning (Wehner, 1998: 217). After Preobrazhensky was expelled from the Party, it was Stalin who required a tribute.

Already in 1925, the industrialization strategy was changed. Wehner describes the fight between the 'agricultural' and 'industrialization' lobbies in 1925–1927 and how it affected the prospects of agricul-

ture. The change did not mean that industrialization was no longer based on the capital contribution from agriculture. However, instead of previously providing the state support to agriculture to strengthen its capability for capital accumulation, the tribute was to be taken by force — by discriminating price and tax policies. The prices scissors were kept wide open. In addition, the state increased the progressive taxation of the peasants. Despite the many Party members protest against this proposal, a very high tribute was taken already in 1926/1927 (see, e.g.: Merl, 1981: 305–309).

The *Litsom k derevne* program assigned to the *kulturniki* the central role in solving the urgent tasks of agriculture — by intensifying agricultural and handicraft production. The reduction of the state financial support primarily hit the less well-to-do farms with insufficient means of production. Chayanov's school had expected that the socialist state would provide financial means in order to help the working middle peasants to become *kulturniki*. As the state support for agriculture was strongly reduced, the agricultural experts warned about the social consequences of this policy: the less money the state invested in agriculture, the smaller number of (working) peasants was able and willing to intensify production by the agricultural research knowledge.

The conflict about whether agriculture or industry was to be prioritized started in August 1925: Kondratiev believed that the quickest way of industrialization was to support agriculture. This position was criticized by the agricultural Marxists and protagonists of forced industrialization (Wehner, 1998: 245–248). When in 1926 a decrease in economic growth became evident, Kondratiev blamed the excessive industrialization program and proposed either to remove tax privileges for poor peasants or to reduce the speed of industrialization. Teodorovich underlined that to increase exports it was necessary either to raise agricultural producer prices or to make concessions for the well-to-do peasants as only they could contribute to capital accumulation on their own. Kondratiev required to stop the persecution of *kulaks*. The growth of agricultural production was impossible when supporting only poor peasants, i.e., in this case, complains that the village did not provide surpluses was nothing else than demagoguery (Wehner, 1998: 269).

In 1926, the *Narkomzem* still demanded incentives for the peasants to accumulate for industrialization. In the STO-discussion on economic policy on February 5, 1926, Teodorovich with Kondratiev, Makarov and Chelintsev demanded to allow the private capital in trade, support the *kustar* industry and limit the credits to industry: capital investments in industry were too high compared to the low investments in agriculture. But Smilga (*Gosplan*) insisted on the high growth rates for industry and declared that agriculture would develop steadily without special financial support (Wehner, 1998: 270–272), which was correct when the Party stopped repressions against *kulaks*.

The Party leadership obviously overestimated the financial resources of the countryside, i.e., the ‘richness’ of the peasants (wrongly assumed due to the expropriation of the nobles’ land). In reality, in the mid-1920s, the per-capita income of the largest family farms was just equal to that of industrial workers’ households, although the former had to finance investments in their farms in addition (Merl, 1981: 427). The reduction of the state support was fateful for agricultural production. In December 1925, the long-term credits for machinery and the financing of special agricultural programs (as the fight against drought) were significantly reduced or cut. Svidersky protested against the cut, because for buying agricultural machines, equipment and cattle most middle peasants needed credits. In his statement to Kalinin, Kondratiev stressed the importance of machinery for agriculture and demanded to give cooperatives freedom of exports (Wehner, 1998: 325–327). Funding of agriculture was further reduced in the summer and fall of 1926 (Wehner, 1998: 273–276).

In the summer of 1926, Groman became the head of the *Gosplan* agricultural section. He did not agree with Kondratiev on limiting industrialization to key branches. His *Gosplan* section provided the control numbers for agricultural reconstruction during the Five-Year-Plan. However, Vyshnevsky pessimistically assessed the new plan — he doubted that the peasants would be able to increase yields in the next years. Therefore, the state investments in agriculture would be of limited use (Wehner, 1998: 310). Groman also believed that peasant farms were necessary for the further growth of agricultural production. The socialist transformation of agriculture would require a higher level of the agricultural productive forces and needed time. It could take place only after the peasant welfare had increased. Groman shared his ideas with the *Narkomzem* experts — that the plans for agricultural development were no longer feasible as the state had not provided the necessary funding. He required to reinvest at least a part of the finance subtracted from agriculture and shared the critical position of the *Narkomzem* experts on the agricultural price policy (Wehner, 1998: 310–311). Yakovlev, the head of the Peoples’ Commissariat of Worker-Peasant Inspection (NK RKI), was convinced that promoting industrialization could be connected with developing agriculture. He declared the need to increase industrial crop and animal-husbandry production and to limit the tax burden of the peasants (Wehner, 1998: 312–313).

In May 1927, the *Narkomzem*-Council member Savchenko informed Stalin about the drastic deteriorating situation in agriculture. He required to urgently correct the agricultural policy and emphasized the damages caused by the price policy: “the most dirty and shameless hunt on the most able peasants is taking place”. Hardworking peasants were blamed to be *kulaks* and dangerous for the Soviet society (Wehner, 1998: 315–316).

In the *Gosplan* discussion on the Five-Year-Plan, Volf and Sokolnikov criticized the fact that hardly any investment in agriculture was

planned. Kondratiev stated that the planned rate of growth of the agricultural gross production (24%) compared to 70% growth in industry was not sufficient. He warned that this would cause a crisis of supply and export of agricultural products, and blamed the low state investments in agriculture. Makarov, Sokolnikov and Kondratiev (at the CC-April Plenum of 1927) suggested only two alternatives: either to allow the stronger peasants to develop their farms without restrictions or to provide high state funding and credits to increase the agricultural production of the smaller middle peasants. According to Makarov's calculation, the state funding was too low to ensure the planned growth. Only by giving freedom to the peasants the fast capital accumulation was possible (Wehner, 1998: 330–335).

In his statement, sent on October 8 to Molotov (on his request before the 15th Party Congress), Kondratiev emphasized the need to create favorable market conditions for the peasants and to improve significantly the supply of agricultural means of production in order to achieve a quicker production increase than in the prewar period. The total capital fund in agriculture in 1926/1927 was only 83% of the prewar level, market production — 77% and exports — 24%. The economic situation of the peasants deteriorated compared to 1913, i.e., they were not the winners of the Revolution (Wehner, 1998: 350–351).

As the state funding of agriculture was very limited, in 1927, Oganovsky proposed a different way to increase agricultural production and exports by all peasant groups. If the Party did not accept a price increase, the organization of agriculture had to be changed to increase crop rotation and intensify agricultural production (Wehner, 1998: 334). For increasing the yields of the peasant farms, Oganovsky proposed for the Five-Year-Plan a new method with lower costs for the state. As the progress of land regulation and consolidation during the 1920s was hindered by the lack of qualified surveyors and their poor salaries, in 1927 a quicker and cheaper means was to be applied: the land in the crop rotation was no longer to be allocated by stripes to households but kept in large 'open' crop rotation fields. The standard of production of stripes in the larger fields was prescribed by *Flurzwang* (obligatory rules on how to cultivate) forcing all peasants to follow the special, state-prescribed standards of cultivation (cleaning and sorting the seeds, and so on). It was expected that this would contribute to a significant growth of yields (by 30 to 35%) during the First Five-Year-Plan. The implementation of this plan started in 1928 with forcing the peasants to join collective farms (Merl, 1985: 176–198; Merl, 2016). The introduction of progressive crop rotations was connected with growing industrial crops, which required a higher work and capital input. The prescribed minimal standards for sowing called 'agrominimum' became obligatory in 1929. To help the poor peasants to keep to the standards, the state financial support was promised (Merl, 1985: 183, 191–195). However, Stalin stopped the necessary financial support; therefore, the grain yields even decreased in the first half of the 1930s by 10%.

Thus, even the final version of the ‘industrialization lobby’s’ Five-Year-Plan was based on peasant farms and required to improve their agricultural technologies to increase yields (Merl, 2016). Only the *kulturniki* were able to increase agricultural production without any state support, and its speed would depend on the supply of improved machinery. To involve more rural households in increasing production, the state had to provide a significantly larger funding.

Many experts warned that simultaneous collectivization and industrialization would have disastrous consequences. Under the rural overpopulation, the high speed of collectivization would socially destabilize the cities and cause starvation in the countryside (Merl, 1985; O krestyanskom...). Many experts suggested that the mechanization of agriculture was based on the production of agricultural machinery. However, only at the end of the first Five-Year-Plan, the Soviet industry started to produce tractors and farm implements necessary for the agricultural mechanization on a broader scale. Stalin’s forced collectivization started in October 1929 before the necessary agricultural machinery was provided.

Kulturniki and their fate under the Party’s counterproductive measures (1925–1929)

The most important reaction to the Party’s call was the emergence of the *kulturniki* — educated and often well-to-do (working) peasants willing to accumulate and improve their farming with agronomic innovations. These were the working peasants Chayanov was looking for. They were satisfied with the Party’s 1925 policy turn. Many expected the promised support from the state, especially the improved machinery. To make investments profitable, the ratio of households producing and consuming agricultural products had to change. The *Litsom k derevne* program would have been successful if regionally about 10% of rural households had become *kulturniki*. The available data shows a close percentage. The *kulturniki* could have significantly increased agricultural production and exports, but the state never provided the promised support.

The willingness to improve farming and to invest became obvious due the high demand in agricultural machinery including tractors. There were many applications for land regulation and consolidation including the demand in *khutors* and *otrubs*. Less than a half of requests were executed due to the lack of land surveyors, their miserable payment, and the lack of the state credit support (Merl, 1985: 176–181).

In this section, I consider the state measures destroying the *Litsom k derevne* policy: the reduction of the promised imports of tractors and machinery and credits for the well-to-do peasants already in

1925/1926, low state purchasing prices for industrial crops, high-quality butter and grain export in 1925 and 1926, the disenfranchisement of 'kulaks' in 1927 and their 'individual taxation' since 1928.

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Reducing the import of tractors and agricultural machinery

To ensure the intensification of agricultural production, the high-quality agricultural machinery was needed, but this demand was not satisfied. After a short period of increase at the beginning of 1925, already in the fall of 1925, after the grain procurement and exports were less than expected (Merl, 1981, 69–80), new imports of agricultural machinery and tractors were stopped for the industrial equipment imports became a priority. While the import of agricultural machinery and tractors was quite high in 1925/1926, it became significantly lower in the next years. The *Gosplan* especially reduced the import of needed and not produced in the country grain threshing and cleaning machines, heavy plows and machinery for processing flax and fodder (Merl, 1981, 265–283; 1985, 231–241).

The peak of agricultural machinery import was reached in April 1926. In 1926/1927 the national production had a higher share in the supply to agriculture than in 1925/1926. In the next years, imports stayed at a low level. Only since October 1929, there was a permanent increase of agricultural machinery imports. The tractor supply almost fully depended on imports. The number of imported tractors was relatively high until September 1925 and after fell with temporary small increases at the beginning of 1926, 1927 and 1929. Only since October 1929, tractor imports significantly increased to reach a new peak in March–April 1930 (Merl, 1981: 265–284).

The national industry could not replace these imports. The most produced machines and implements for agriculture were suitable only for small farms up to 8 hectares and would not help the *kulturniki* to intensify their production. As many peasants before, Chayanov in his 1927 statement to Molotov complained about the low quality of these machines. Additional problems were caused by the lack of spare parts and worsening credit conditions, i.e., a significant part of the produced machinery could not be sold. In 1928/1929 machines for animal traction power stood unsold in the stores. The government complained that industry did not produce the agricultural machinery demanded by the peasants. Spare parts were in short supply (Merl, 1981: 273; 1985: 233–235; Chayanov, 1927a).

In June 1926, the *Gosplan* decided that tractors and agricultural machinery should be provided only to collective farms (Wehner, 1998: 277–279). *Kulaks* were forbidden to join machinery cooperatives, and the fight against 'pseudo-cooperatives' started (Merl, 1985: 309–312). In 1926–1927, a significant part of tractors was held by peasants, others — by peasant machine cooperatives (Merl, 1985: 239). After the

ban to sell tractors to *kulaks*, the authorities started to expropriate tractors from peasant. In 1927–1929, under the state pressure, the *kulturniki* reduced the machinery purchased. The repressions against them also contributed to the failure of the plan of ‘mobilizing peasant finances’. In 1929, this plan was fulfilled by agricultural cooperatives only by 10% (Merl, 1985: 249–250)

Table 1. Tractors in agriculture, 1927–1930 (Merl, 1985: 239)

	October 1927	October 1928	October 1929	October 1930
total of these:	24,504	26,733	34,943	66,332
single peasants	6,309 (26%)	2,487 (9,3%)		
(tractor) cooperatives	4,422 (18%)	6,673 (25%)	3,769 (11%)	
MTS			2,387	20,801
state farms	4,651	6,719	9,678	24,953
collective farms/kusty	9,122	10,854	19,109	20,578

Collectivization was not prepared by importing tractors and heavy agricultural machinery. In the beginning of 1930, just 2% of plowing was done by tractors. For the spring sowing of 1930, hardly any tractor towed machinery was available (Merl, 1985: 236, 251). The sudden need to replace horses due to the lack of fodder after the start of the forced collectivization determined the need for the tractor imports just at the peak of the forced industrialization.

Disenfranchisement of ‘exploiting’ peasants in 1927

For the Soviet elections in 1927, new rules were introduced — disenfranchising ‘exploiting *kulaks*’. Thousands of ambitious working peasants loyal to the Soviet power were disenfranchised. In 1925/1926, there were 500 complaints against disenfranchisement, in 1927 — 22.000 (including family members, the number would be three times higher). The majority of complaints were from the main grain-producing regions. The total number of disenfranchised in the rural population increased from 424.000 (1,1% of adults) to 1.398.000 (3,3%) (Merl, 1981: 424–430; 1993: 228–235).

To be named ‘exploiting *kulaks*’, often renting agricultural machinery to the poor peasants or the ‘wrong classification’ of temporary employment of hired workers was sufficient. Local authorities relied on such a criterion of exploitation as land or implements rent, which was rather an act of solidarity with the poor. Any classification of farms as exploiting was arbitrary. All contemporary studies failed to identify

any clear criteria of exploitation in the Soviet agriculture (Merl, 1981: 1985) — many arbitrary and accidental criteria were used: ‘non-working income’ from renting a room to the local teacher, land, implements or working horses lease, hiring day laborers or nurse maids. To define ‘exploitation’, the statistics mainly used relative prosperity: the value of the means of production or a craft workshop. When asked about the definition of the *kulak*, rural people sometimes answered: “peasants who work on their fields on Sundays” (Merl, 1981: 424).

Desperate protests of many *kulturniki* were the consequence. As they had followed the Party’s call, many believed that their disenfranchisement was an error for it meant social stigmatization. Under the threat to be declared counterrevolutionaries, many *kulturniki* sent their complaints to the high-rank Party members. Some of them tried to help the *kulturniki* by revealing the dishonest character of the official anti-*kulak* campaign. Only Kaminsky openly opposed the disenfranchisement. The article of the VTsIK-secretary Kiselev, the efforts of Rykov and of the head of the Central Election Commission Enukidze led to the start of the campaign against disenfranchising *kulturniki* (Wehner, 1998: 292–296). Rykov insisted on returning the voting rights to many complainers, for example, to the farmer who employed two wage laborers for he had young children: Rykov stated that this farmer ran a ‘cultural’ farm with yields twice as high as the surrounding peasants (Merl, 1981: 428–429). Some Party leaders declared that such farms were not ‘exploiting’. On February 15, 1927, the *Bednota* used the terms *intensivniki* and ‘typical working’ for the middle peasants with such ‘cultural’ and progressive farms, while the well-to-do *kulaki*, on the contrary, systematically exploited the poor by land lease and so on (Merl, 1981: 429). These definitions were repeated over and over: the *kulaks* got profits from trade or usury credits (both hardly existed in the mid-1920s), while the ‘working’ well-to-do peasants earned their main income from their own farms (Merl, 1981: 425; 1993: 231–235).

Even the temporary disenfranchisement made the *kulturniki* ‘enemies’ and had consequences — changed their behavior and prospects (Merl, 1993: 231–235). In 1927, the chairman of the credit cooperative stated that due to the disenfranchisement many lost their energy to enlarge farms and started drinking. Many stigmatized refused to continue leasing means of production or land. The first lists of ‘*lishentsy*’ was later used for individual taxation and liquidation of *kulak* farms (Wehner, 1998: 292–296; Merl, 1985: 134–137).

Low purchasing prices in 1925–1926: Sabotaging the idea of cooperation

Agriculture suffered from the state price policy keeping the agricultural producer prices low. In the 1920s, the peasants had to sell much more products to buy the same amount of industrial goods as before 1914, which contributed to the transfer of capital from agriculture to industry.

When the state established control over an agrarian market, it lowered the procurement prices, which affected primarily products depending on marketing and not produced by peasants: industrial crops and high-quality export butter in 1925/1926, grain — in 1926/1927. All this reduced the incentives to this production. However, animal products could be sold on local markets at good prices. For instance, in Siberia, the peasants stopped producing the high-quality butter for export for they could sell the low-quality butter on local markets (Rossiiskie... 2021: 80–88; Merl, 1981).

The price policy also affected the peasant interest in joining cooperatives. Under the state control of prices, cooperatives were organized in unions to pay low prices to their members. As they often bought agricultural products from their members at remote places, they were forced to subtract the transport costs from the prices. Thus, cooperatives paid the lowest prices to the peasants, much lower than the state trade agencies at the railway stations (ports) or local markets: the well-to-do peasants transported their grain to the stations and sold it to the state agency (Merl, 1981).

The lack of the promised support to cooperatives had disastrous consequences. Sadyrin, the head of the *Selskосоyuz*, reported on May 29, 1926, the bankruptcy of many cooperative unions (Wehner, 1998: 277–280). In 1927, Belenky criticized the state cooperative policy due to the re-nationalization of cooperatives in 1927. Only the participation of the well-to-do peasants would ensure the fast development of cooperatives (Wehner, 1998: 347–348): after cooperatives failed to provide capital from the countryside, the Party leadership abandoned Lenin's 'cooperative plan' in the mid 1926 (Wehner, 1998: 364). Chayanov and the *Narkomzem* experts were convinced that it was unrealistic to subtract capital from cooperatives without providing previously the state funding (Wehner, 1998: 276).

Due to the cooperatives' failure under the state control, in 1926–1927, a new phenomenon appeared — 'wild cooperatives' not joining the state-controlled unions, i.e., they could work for the advantage and in the interest of their members (Merl, 1981: 161–162). The state control damaged Chayanov's core idea of unions strengthening cooperatives and blocked the non-capitalist development of peasant farms through cooperatives' accumulation in the countryside. Thus, the price policy sabotaged the cooperative organization of the peasantry as suggested by Lenin and Chayanov.

'Individual taxation' of the richest peasants in 1928: The start of expropriation

Following the resolution of the 15th Party Congress, in April 1928, the 'individual taxation' was introduced. It often meant a tax payment much higher than the farm's total money income for the tax was cal-

culated not on the income but on the value of the means of production. To pay such a tax, the farms had to sell a part of their means of production (Merl, 1981; 1983, 177–360). Similar to disenfranchisement, there were many complaints.

After the failure of Stalin's 'extraordinary measures' to take grain in the beginning of 1928, in the summer of 1928, for a short time, the fight against the *kulaks* stopped. On July 23, 1928, the People's Commissariat of Finances issued a circular letter to protect the *kulturniki* — to correct the local authorities' 'abuses', it insisted on the individual taxation of 'exploiting farms' except for the well-to-do farms which were not 'exploiting' by employing laborers, trading or leasing farm implements. According to the circular letter, there were many 'terrible mistakes': often branches of the 'commercial character' such as poultry production were individually taxed. About a half of the cases were classified according to the general size of the farm or just due to personal revenge. The letter stated that many middle peasants suffered from the individual taxation.

At the beginning of September 1928, the SNK ordered a general scrutiny of the individual taxation, which freed every second registered farm: instead of 422.300 farms, 219.400 were individually taxed, among them still many *kulturniki* (Merl, 1985: 112–119; 1993: 222–228). For the upper group of 12% of the peasant households, the tax doubled in 1928/1929. At the conference on taxation in January 1929, Yakovlev and Kalinin spoke of the widespread gloating in the countryside — "with the taxation, the Soviet power hit the *kulturniki* on the head (*tresnet po golove*)" (Merl, 1985: 119).

Self-dekulakization in 1927–1929: Kulturniki's desperate fight for survival

For fear of being stigmatized as *kulaks*, many well-to-do *kulturniki* started the 'self-dekulakization': in 1927–1929, they tried to reduce the size of their farms, sold agricultural machines and avoided anything the state would consider 'exploitation'. Many *kulturniki* stopped leasing means of production and horses, which affected a large number of peasants who needed such help to cultivate their fields due to the lack of implements and/or traction power.

There is a lot of regional data on the self-dekulakization, which proves that Party's class approach sabotaged the urgently needed increase in agricultural production and efficiency. The contemporary statistics used the term '*kulak*' for the well-to-do peasants, and many of such farms were of the *kulturniki*, because the 'class' categorization was based mainly on the farms' means of production rather than 'exploitation' criteria. Therefore, in the following I will use the term 'well-to-do' for those named *kulaks* in the sources, and 'medium-sized farms' for those recorded as middle peasants.

The data confirms that the well-to-do farms in the main producing regions (Middle Volga, North Caucasus, Siberia and Ukraine) re-

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duced the number of their working cattle by 18 to 24%: the number of cows fell by 20% in the North Caucasus and Ukraine and by 28% in traditionally butter-exporting Siberia. In regions not producing agricultural surpluses, like the Western and Moscow Regions, the number of working cattle and cows in the well-to-do farms decreased only by 3 to 7%. In all producing regions, the middle peasants also reduced the number of working cattle by about 2% and the number of cows in Siberia — by 8%. The share of farms with agricultural machinery slightly increased in the producing regions in 1927–1929 (in the North Caucasus — from 25 to 27%, in Ukraine — 22 to 26%). Only in Siberia, where the peasants switched from animal husbandry to crop production under the state price policy, this share grew from 36 to 44% (Merl, 1985: 159).

In Ukraine, about 35%, in the North Caucasus and the Lower and Middle Volga, nearly 30% of farms rented implements and working cattle to cultivate their fields. In Ukraine and the Lower Volga, about 30%, in the North Caucasus more than 40% of other farms produced in the form of ‘*supryaga*’ — 2 or more households worked together with their means of production and working cattle. The peasants, who were able to cultivate their fields independently with own implements and working cattle, were in the minority in the main producing regions: only about 27% in Ukraine, 20% in the North Caucasus, and 35% in the Lower Volga Region, which proves how weak the peasant farms in Soviet Russia of the 1920s were (Merl, 1985: 159–161).

Due to the ‘self-dekulakization’, in the main grain-producing regions, land lease reduced dramatically in 1927–1929: by more than 60% in Ukraine, 53% in the Middle Volga, and 26% in the North Caucasus. This did not mean that the need in land lease reduced: for fear of being classified as *kulaks*, hardly any peasant dared to rent land or even farm implements: only 30% of the peasants leasing farm implements in 1929 did this already in 1927, i.e., the majority of such farms decided to lease farm implements by the order of the authorities. This new form of the state compulsion was first introduced in the 1928 spring sowing due to the need of farms in implements (Merl, 1985: 160–164).

Only about 15% of the well-to-do farms had the means of production for more than 800 rubles. Among them, 57% had agricultural machines, about 96% — working cattle and farm implements (Merl, 1985: 162).

Peasant dissatisfaction with the end of the program in 1927–1929

The Party’s approach to the peasant question started to change in the fall of 1925. Zinoviev turned from the promoter of the *Litsom k derevne* program into its critic. Together with Kamenev and Stalin, he started criticize this program in public in the summer of 1925

(Wehner, 1998: 249–251). In April 1926, Zinoviev and Kamenev developed a position close to Trotsky. Stalin and Milyutin confirmed that the peasants lived better than before the Revolution (Wehner, 1998: 283–285). The CC October-Plenum of 1925 required to protect poor peasants from the ‘kulak influence’. Despite the protest of Mikoyan, the grain procurement price was reduced. The subsequent problems with achieving the overoptimistic goals of the grain procurement and exports in the fall of 1925 strengthened the opposition to the *Litsom k derevne* program (Merl, 1981).

The abandonment of the program caused a new wave of the peasant dissatisfaction. The OGPU reported about the requests to create a peasant union. When the Party ignored the significant contribution of the ‘working’ middle peasants in the October Manifesto to the 10th anniversary of the Revolution by providing rewards (tax exemption) only to poor peasants, dissatisfaction reached a new peak (Merl, 1993: 442–486). The peasant-worker relations worsened, and many peasants expressed their envy towards the privileged workers. In the mid-1920s, unlike most urban workers, the majority of peasant households did not reach their pre-war level of consumption.

After the Party’s abandonment of the program and the pressure to join collective farms in the beginning of 1928, some *kulturniki* sent a joint letter to the *Pravda* in June 1928 and proposed a compromise: they suggested to create ‘peasant-state farms’ as an experiment in order to balance the Party’s strive to build large-scale enterprises and the peasant interests of survival. The peasants would provide land and farm implements to the enterprise running under the state control. In return, they asked only for a small monthly salary as the state workers and for moderate fees for the use of their implements. They disagreed with collective farms as they did not ensure the peasants’ survival — they offered instead of the monthly salary the distribution of an unpredictable profit at the end of the agricultural year, and the state could manipulate this ‘profit’ by the low procurement prices (O krestyanskom...; Merl, 1985; 1993: 453–482).

Due to their miserable income situation, many middle and poor peasants dreamed of ‘proletarianisation’ — of becoming workers in industry or at the state farm with monthly salaries. They could imagine the nationalization of agriculture in the form of state farms, which would make them workers with monthly salaries.

Chayanov’s statements to Molotov (and the Gosplan) in October 1927 on the feasibility of the *Litsom k derevne* program

In his letter to Molotov, Chayanov stressed that a new type of people was running farms in the Soviet countryside. Many participated in the Revolution and served in the Red Army. They were eager to use agricultural knowledge and invest in agricultural technology to rational-

ize their farming. Even if they still had a ‘petty bourgeois consciousness’, they no longer followed the tradition of their grandfathers: “As a result of the combination of the new peasant with the new achievements of agronomy, we already have massive examples of the implementation of our agronomic achievements” (Chayanov, 1927a: 214). When making a list of the existing cooperatives, he stressed that the Soviet state already had a monopoly on trade and the market. Now the question was in which direction and for what aims the state wanted to exercise its control over cooperatives (Chayanov, 1927a: 216–217). Chayanov stressed the high potential of rural development by combining the ‘new’ peasants with the new agronomy achievements: “to cut it short: the peasant started to move” (*sdvinulos’ s mertvoi točki i poshlo samokhodom*) (Chayanov, 1927a: 214).

To distinguish peasant farms developing by the ‘capitalist model’ from the pre-capitalist *kulak*, Chayanov used the term ‘farmer’ (*fermer*), who ran his farm not ‘by exploiting others’ but by his own work, wanted to intensify his farming in a cultural way by using agricultural research knowledge. Although Chayanov did not use the term ‘*kulturniki*’, it described exactly his ‘new peasant’ loyal to the Soviet power.

Chayanov was convinced that the *kulaks* were a feature of the past no longer existing in Soviet Russia in the mid-1920s. The leveling of the agricultural revolution had turned nearly all rural households into the ‘working’ peasants. When starting accumulation, they would create new jobs for other rural households suffering from the rural overpopulation. According to Chayanov, capitalism (and exploitation) was a feature of industry lacking the necessary workforce, while the working peasant family farms possessed the necessary labor resources. Based on his demographic understanding of the rural differentiation, the capitalist ‘farmer’ would not appear directly or quickly. Chayanov believed that the non-capitalist development of the peasantry in Soviet Russia was possible in the course of cooperation. Therefore, he demanded to support the peasant incentives to organize cooperatives working for their benefit. By making cooperative accumulation attractive, the peasants would profit from their strengthening and development by depositing their money in cooperatives.

For illustrating his ideas to Molotov, Chayanov used America as an example of the most developed capitalist country. He believed that the American farmer had already modernized agriculture. He explained that in the USA, the capitalization of farmers developed through vertical cooperation. Cooperatives provided the farmers with auxiliary plants for processing agricultural products, elevators for storing grain, cold storage and so on. He underlined that the vertical cooperation in America did not start by itself: initially, the financial capital provided the starting capital, and then the farmers started to direct their capital to cooperatives. Chayanov recommended to Molotov to copy this model in order to accumulate capital in the Soviet agri-

culture: the socialist state would have to provide capital necessary to start vertical cooperation (Chayanov, 1927a: 216). Capital accumulation in cooperatives would be a precondition for confining the peasant private accumulation: by organizing the 'new peasants' in the 'societal forms' of cooperatives the state would prevent their becoming 'capitalist farmers' in a distant future.

Chayanov stated that this trend of the cultural development of farms would become widespread if the state had not questioned the incentives. He expressed the concern that many incentives (promised by the *Litsom k derevne* program) were already lost due to the Party's counterproductive policy. He considered the extraordinary tax progression as the biggest problem blocking the development of the working peasants by prohibiting the expansion of farms (Chayanov, 1927a: 214–215). He was less concerned about the price policy: the farms improving their technologies worked with less costs and were less affected by the low procurement prices than the farms not raising their efficiency. He warned that the tax policy would not only deprive the farm heads of the interest to further improve their farms but also would sabotage the cooperative way of peasants' accumulation to avoid a capitalist development (Chayanov, 1927a: 215).

Chayanov emphasized that the evolution of the working family farms in many regions towards capitalist farmers was not alarming, if at the same time the whole country would develop cooperatives as the societal economy (*obshchestvennoe khozyaystvo*) (Chayanov, 1927a: 217). At that time, peasants were not ready to become farmers. Although Chayanov wanted to prevent the progressive (working) peasants from becoming capitalist farmers, he explained to Molotov for which tasks and in what regions they could be useful to ensure the growth of agricultural production in Soviet Russia (Chayanov, 1927a: 217–218): in rather remote regions with enough land and few people, to increase the production of primarily extensive or special crop cultures (investment in farm machinery would have the largest effect).

Chayanov's vision depended fully on the state; therefore, his letter to Molotov can be considered a request to change the Party's policy in favor of the 'new peasants' and cooperatives (the blocking of cooperation by nationalization was already obvious in the fall of 1927)².

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2. Chayanov stressed that there was no danger in the peasants becoming farmers if the cooperatives would strengthen socialist elements in the countryside on the line: credit — buying — selling — serving agriculture — processing — joint field production and nationalization of agricultural branches in huge cooperative enterprises (Chayanov, 1927a: 218–219): in such a cooperative system, there would be no place for farmers. Chayanov agreed that at the beginning it would be necessary to focus on industry, but after the processing industry, transportation and energy branch had developed, it would be necessary to focus on the investment in the agricultural industrialization (Chayanov, 1927a: 220–221).

Chayanov blamed the Soviet state for the lack of willingness to invest in agriculture. Already at the beginning of 1925, he required the state support for organizing small credit in agriculture: the state should provide at least 2000 rubles of the long-term credit to each credit cooperative (like the Tsarist state in 1904) in order to profit in the future — each ruble provided to the countryside in the form of state credit would contribute manifold to the increase in the national income and peasants' ability to pay taxes. Additional state funding was needed for melioration and agricultural measures. In the future, the main task of cooperatives would be to mobilize peasants' deposits (Merl, 1981: 199; Chayanov, 1925a). Chayanov also underlined to Molotov and the *Gosplan* the significance of the state financial support for agricultural research, especially on the needs of industrialized agriculture, and complained about the lack of such funding (Chayanov, 1927a: 220–221; 1927b: 201–202).

I do not agree with Wehner' idea (1998: 352) that Kondratiev and Chayanov had different positions on the peasant differentiation. Chayanov still hoped to return the Party's policy to the peasant incentives and support for cooperation. Kondratiev rather made recommendations on what had to be done at that moment and faced the ruling bodies' resistance against the increased funding of agriculture. He had to defend his position and was aware that the funding would not be provided. Therefore, he was convinced that an increase in production could be ensured only by the well-to-do peasants. Chayanov's idea of a non-capitalist development of the peasantry depended fully on the state support. Both Kondratiev and Chayanov warned about overestimating the differentiation, describe a new type of the peasant strongly different from the *kulak*, believed in the possible trend towards (capitalist) farmers but did not expect capitalist farmers in Soviet Russia in the nearest future.

Were Chayanov's proposals to Molotov realistic?

It is hard to say whether Chayanov's idea of cooperation was realistic and could lead to a 'societal economy'. We only know that the Party did not accept his suggestion. Cooperatives in other countries not declaring the construction of socialism, in the interwar period and especially after the Second World War, did not develop in this direction. Considering the special situation in Soviet Russia with comparable small and weak peasant farms (even the 'well-to-do' farms belonged to this group) and the very positive experience of credit cooperatives before the First World War, the cooperative organization might have become of crucial importance for the development of peasant farms and the efficiency of agricultural production in Soviet Russia.

The idea that the peasants would deposit their financial surpluses to develop and strengthen the cooperative movement is interest-

ing. The key question is the type of the state regulation of cooperatives. From what happened in Soviet Russia, we learnt what to avoid in order not to demotivate the peasants. Looking back from today, the cooperative organization and industrialization of agriculture, according to Chayanov, would not be the final stage: processing, storage and sales were of crucial importance for strengthening cooperatives. However, today, for example, the sales are controlled by the giant trade monopolies, and even huge cooperative unions cannot compete with them.

Another crucial point is the countryside labor surplus. Chayanov required to focus on intensifying rather than mechanizing agriculture (Merl, 1981, 278–279; Chayanov, 1925b). But the majority of small, middle and poor farms did not see their future in agriculture, especially as the Soviet rule gave them every reason to envy the industrial workers. From the peasant complains in 1927, it is evident that they would have preferred ‘proletarianization’ — becoming workers in industry or agriculture, i.e., out-migration from agriculture to industry or services would have become the main trend. Moreover, the emphasis on the scientific research and efficiency of production would require to reduce the labor input in agriculture. To provide the *kulturniki* with the decent income even under the non-capitalist development in the future, the relations of those engaged in agriculture and in other branches had to change radically.

Conclusion: the failure of the Bolshevik peasant policy due to the fight against ‘exploitation’ instead of poverty?

The agricultural program *Litsom k derevne* did not have any alternatives in 1927 — after the political decision was made to prioritize industrialization and to limit funding of agriculture. ‘Working’ peasants willing to use the agricultural research knowledge and having the necessary means of production (like the *kulturniki* — about 10% of rural households) were capable of increasing agricultural production even in these conditions. With the higher profitability and lower costs, the *kulturniki* could have coped with unfavorable prices having no other choice than to produce and market their production to feed their families and to accumulate. Only political discrimination and expropriation could stop them.

As the supply of the improved machinery lagged behind the demand, no quick increase in agricultural production was possible. Intensification rather than mechanization (as Chayanov proposed in 1925) was rational under the rural overpopulation. But intensification depended on the supply of the necessary means of production, i.e., on the state support. Therefore, the further increase in agricultural production in 1927 depended on the *kulturniki*, the ‘new peasants’ Chayanov was speaking about. For intensifying their production, they

would have needed freedom to decide on how to develop their farms and create jobs in the countryside (the '*samokhod*' Chayanov underlined to Molotov).

The change in the concept of industrialization was unavoidable for industry in general develops faster than agriculture. Subtracting capital from agriculture by the price policy was feasible and possible, but it slowed down the agricultural growth. Progressive taxes were much more harmful due to destroying incentives to work. As a consequence, the state financial support for the peasants and agricultural cooperatives (requested by Chayanov) was missing (at least for most of the decade), which slowed down the agricultural production growth. Chayanov's ideas were feasible even if postponed, as long as the state did not annihilate the *kulturniki* and true cooperatives, which happened in 1927–1929.

There was no way to combine the Party's return to the 'class war' (against *kulaks*) with the *Litsom k derevne* program. The Party's decision to fight against the imagined enemy no longer existing in the Soviet countryside did not depend on the change in the industrialization strategy — it was determined by the political calculations in the internal fight between fractions, and by the Party's misunderstanding of the nature of small peasant farms. This had disastrous consequences for the fate of the *kulturniki* and for the state goal to increase agricultural production and exports. Stalin and Khrushchev never stopped to suspect the peasants and later collective farms to be 'rich'. Disenfranchisement, individual taxation and collectivization repressed the *kulturniki* as *kulaks*, which determined poor results of agricultural production until the end of the Soviet rule.

Therefore, it is necessary to finish the fruitless debate on the 'class differentiation' of the peasantry and to focus on the real issues behind the mid-1920s controversy: whether the growth of agricultural production and efficiency required any agricultural expertise (by capable peasants and scientists) and the state financial support (for developing cooperatives). Both points were the basic requests of Chayanov to Molotov in October 1927. Unlike Chayanov, the Party leaders from Stalin to Brezhnev never understood that both industry and agriculture could be successful only on the basis of expertise instead of command from above.

Chayanov's idea of the possible non-capitalist development of the peasantry depended on the state's approval of the agricultural expertise and the state's willingness to support peasant farms and cooperatives financially. We can only guess Chayanov's priorities after his idea of the socialist reconstruction of agriculture in a non-capitalist way lost political feasibility in 1928 due to Stalin's extraordinary measures for grain procurement. It is quite evident that Chayanov did not seek a structural change of agricultural production by collectivization, and rather supported peasant farms, like other agricultural specialists including V. G. Groman. This would have allowed a slow

but steady increase in agricultural production without food shortages and famines. H. Hunter calculated that peasant farming would have provided a much better framework for industrialization during the First Five-Year-Plan.

Chayanov's trust in the cooperative movement also depended on the state support (like the one provided by the Tsarist government after 1904. Without the nationalization of cooperatives in 1927, they would have become of great importance for strengthening the *kulturniki's* farms with the necessary means of production. Chayanov was not clear about the nature of the state regulation of cooperation, but it is clear that he did not mean telling cooperatives what to do.

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Реалистичность чаяновской теории крестьянского сельского хозяйства при советской власти: возникновение «культурников» в ответ на политику «Лицом к деревне»

Штефан Мерль, доктор исторических наук, профессор Билефельдского университета, Университетштрассе, 25, 33615, Билефельд (Германия).
E-mail: smerl@uni-bielefeld.de

Аннотация. Политика «Лицом к деревне» — короткий и несправедливо забытый эпизод советской истории. Эта программа развития сочетала социалистическое строительство и индустриализацию с развитием крестьянского сельского хозяйства. Программа были принята на Пленуме ЦК КПСС в апреле 1925 года (на короткий срок), а разрабатывали ее такие аграрные специалисты, как Челинцев, Кондратьев и Макаров, т. е. люди, близкие Чайанову по взглядам. Некоторые крестьяне позитивно восприняли программу: ответив на призыв партии, «культурники» начали рационализировать свои хозяйства «культурным образом» — на основе сельскохозяйственных исследований. В статье оценивается осуществимость политики «Лицом к деревне» после двух принципиальных изменений 1925–1927 годов — практически полного прекращения государственного финансирования сельского хозяйства и возврата к классовой борьбе на селе (против воображаемых кулаков). Аргументация политических решений содержала упоминания заявлений Чайанова и его коллег Молотову в октябре 1927 года.

Автор описывает первое обращение государства к основным проблемам сельского хозяйства в начале 1920х годов, а также как и почему НЭП породил иную программу сельскохозяйственного развития — «Лицом к деревне», которая серьезно пересмотрела прежние позиции большевиков. Автор называет причины неудачи

этой программы и то, как изменения в стратегии индустриализации страны повлияли на политические решения в отношении деревни. Для реализации программы «Лицом к деревне» решающее значение имела позиция крестьянства. В статье рассмотрены государственные меры сельскохозяйственного развития, отчаянная борьба «культурников» против дискриминации, а также оценки Чаяновым и его школой этой программы и перспектив «трудящихся крестьян».

Заключение: 1) Аграрная программа «Лицом к деревне» не имела альтернативы после политического решения о приоритетной поддержке индустриализации; только культурники как зажиточные крестьяне могли наращивать сельскохозяйственное производство в таких условиях — благодаря высокой доходности и низким издержкам. Однако политическая дискриминация и угроза конфискации имущества сдерживали их усилия по развитию своих хозяйств. Таким образом, не существовало способа совместить возврат к «классовой борьбе» с кулаками и программу «Лицом к деревне». Внутрипартийная борьба за власть имела катастрофические последствия не только для «культурников», но и для сельскохозяйственного производства и экспорта. 2) Автор предлагает прекратить бесплодные дебаты о «классовой дифференциации» крестьянства и сосредоточиться на предельно важном вопросе 1920х годов: действительно ли рост сельскохозяйственного производства и его эффективности требовал аграрной экспертизы (способных на это крестьян и исследователей) и государственной финансовой поддержки (столь необходимых институтов, как кооперативы). Аграрная экспертиза и государственное финансирование были основными запросами Чаянова к Молотову в 1927 году. Партийное руководство (от Сталина до Брежнева) не понимало, что не только промышленность, но и сельское хозяйство быть успешны только при условии использования экспертного знания, а не командного подхода.

Ключевые слова: Чаянов, крестьянское сельское хозяйство, советское сельское хозяйство, аграрные эксперты, советская власть, культурники, «Лицом к деревне»