The discussion in perspective

Of late there has been a renewed discussion on the Soviet collectivization drive of 1929-30, to which the number of articles on this subject appearing in Soviet Studies bears witness. In the Soviet Union, historians, with the partial removal of the shackles of silence, have also begun to re-assess collectivization itself and, more importantly, its impact on present-day Soviet agriculture. Several questions emerge immediately from this discussion: Was the collectivization unavoidable; was it, despite the upheaval, beneficial in the long run; was it carried out too early, before the state was ready for it; could it have been carried out in some other way? In addition to all these questions (and no doubt many others can be asked in the same context), it is beginning to become clear that we may soon have to ask another question: Was there, in fact, in the winter of 1929-30, a mass (sploschnaya) collectivization at all? In connection with all these problems, Stalin’s role in the proceedings emerges as the dominant factor, since he was the self-acknowledged dictator of the party and the main engineer of collectivization. And, whereas up to 1956 the Soviet historians had nothing but praise for Stalin and collectivization, while Western writers were inclined to condemn both, lately the roles are to some extent being reversed: it is the Soviet historians who now lay the blame squarely on Stalin’s shoulders, but in the West it is sometimes suggested that Stalin was far-sighted enough to see that collectivization was a necessary concomitant to industrialization; and that harsh as the measures were, they brought the Soviet Union the status of a world power in the long run.

The irony of the situation lies in the fact that neither Stalin’s enthronement nor deposition bear any relation to the man himself as he was in the late twenties. Close research into the subject gives a picture which shows very few of the features which are being built into Stalin now. Recent studies show that the plan for collectivization was not thought out deeply, that Stalin wavered about it to the very last moment, and that only the escalating events of that fatal autumn of 1929 pushed him into actions for which he may have had a taste, but of which he was very afraid. It was Alexander Erlich who first spotted Stalin’s hesitant policy throughout 1928 and part of 1929 and very rightly opened his essay with Lenin’s quotation, borrowed from Napoleon: ‘On s’engage, et puis on voit’.1 The same emerges even

more clearly from Dr. Lewin's article on the background to collectivization. Both authors, however, place Stalin's resolve to collectivize at some time between the end of 1928 and April 1929. By April 1929, the time of the CC plenum, Stalin had already made his decision. This is correct in principle; but it must be stressed that the collectivization Stalin was bent on was not in the least similar to the collectivization which is said to have occurred between October 1929 and March 1930. Nor was Stalin at variance with Bukharin on this question; both protagonists agreed that, in the future interests of the country, the status of agriculture would have to be changed. But there were points of disagreement, and these touched on the general policy towards the peasants and on the approach to the free market in connection with this. These differences were very well summed up by Stalin, when he argued that Bukharin's advocacy of a free market to encourage the peasants to sell foodstuffs would be just as injurious to NEP as measures of complete compulsion advocated by the Left: 'NEP means freedom of the market within certain limits, . . . but safeguarded by the regulating role of the state on the [conditions of the] market. . . . We have no free play of prices on the market, as is normal in capitalist countries . . . while NEP exists, both sides must be retained: the side directed against a regime of War Communism . . . and the other side, directed against a complete freedom of trade'. On agriculture, Stalin expressed the usual pious platitudes about the necessity of supplying the peasants with new tools and new techniques, and about consolidating the small holdings, so as to 'make gradually a transition from small peasant farms to large collective industry'. This was April 1929, and the listeners were the Central Committee members themselves. Was Stalin deceiving them, while he had already formed his plan in secret? There was to be collectivization, Stalin said, but this was to be on the basis of agreement with the peasants. The peasants were not as hostile to collectivization as they had been two or three years ago: 'Now we have whole strata of peasants who look at kolkhozy and sovkhozy as a source of help as far as seed grain, improved cattle, machines and tractors are concerned. Now, given only machines and tractors, the matter of collective farms will move forward with greater intensity'. Not only this, Stalin added, but the state could already produce some machinery, or, to be exact: 'At least, the very basis is being prepared at a quicker pace'. All this was neither very new, nor revolutionary; as

4 Ibid. p. 240.
5 Ibid. pp. 245-6.
Stalin himself pointed out, the party had foreseen the need to collectivize agriculture soon after the October revolution; it had not been carried out then, because there were no means for it. But Stalin did not assert that there were means for it in the spring of 1929; he merely said that the peasants were less hostile to collectivization than they had been and that the state was beginning to provide a basis for the necessary machinery. Thus, while plumping for collectivization, Stalin did not intend to force it upon the country in one huge dose, without the means and the machinery necessary for such a step. What he was defending at this April plenum was: (a) the rationality of collectivization, and (b) the need to support the very modest extent of collectivization as envisaged in the five-year plan.

It was not in differing views on collectivization that the basic difference between Stalin and Bukharin lay. Neither was the difference on free marketing the main bone of contention. It was on the approach to the peasants that the two men could not agree. Both of them had watched the policy of War Communism and its fiasco: the inability the state had then shown of coercing the peasants into growing food for the government. Both had seen how Lenin had resolved the crisis—by first invoking an alliance with the medium peasants, and then with all producing peasants, by restoring the peasants’ right to hire labour, to market freely and to regulate their sowing by a semi-free play of market prices. But the lessons each man drew from this experiment of War Communism were different. Where Bukharin was awed by the strength and resistance of the peasants, Stalin inferred that, given a sufficient amount of supervision, the experiment could be repeated again, and more successfully. Where War Communism had failed, reasoned Stalin, was not because the peasant was stronger than the state but because the state was not yet strong enough to subordinate the peasant. Provided with a large enough apparatus of coercion, the state could make the peasant sow, grow and harvest the grain, even though most of it would have to be given away to the state at nominal prices. Even so, it is doubtful whether Stalin would have resorted to the extraordinary measures (as the whole range of coercive means was called), had not circumstances virtually forced him to do so.

Collectivization

There were two main points in the government policy in 1929—the first (as Dr. Lewin has pointed out) a short-term one: the procurement of sufficient grain to guarantee the success of industrialization; and the second: a gradual collectivization, based on the developing technological potential of the state. There was no deceit in Stalin’s exposé of policy to the April plenum, no hiding of real objectives; whatever he
had to hide, it was not the plans for a sudden and complete collectiv-
ization—for he had none. Indeed, in the existing situation, he knew well
that there could be no plans, unless and until he had prepared some
basis for collectivization. This basis did not consist solely of machinery;
given a sufficient amount of currency, machines could be purchased
abroad. Nor was it merely a matter of convincing the peasants that
collectivization was a beneficial step. This, Stalin knew, could be
substituted by compulsion (though he was not yet ready to resort to
that sort of compulsion). The lack of readiness consisted in something
far more important and more difficult to prepare—it was the administra-
tive incapacity of the state machine to deal with such a drastic reversal
of the situation, and the complete lack of trained personnel to carry out
the collectivization and to guide the new collective farms to prosperity
and productivity. It would be unjust to say that Stalin was not interested
in administration; after all, it was he, and not Bukharin, who had been
in charge of the administration for some eight years; it was he, and not
Bukharin, who stressed the essential need of Russia for trained cadres;
finally, it was he who brought about the real revolution in training a suf-
ficient number of skilled men to serve the new Soviet state. Stalin was
not an administrator par excellence; he lacked both the cultural back-
ground and the training which would have made him so; but he had the
instincts of a good administrator; he knew what could and what could
not work, administratively speaking and, within the rough framework
of the Soviet state, he made probably better use of administration with
the smallest possible means than anyone had been able to do in any other
country.

It must be stressed here that despite the policy of developing terror
which had been growing since 1928 (a policy in part designed to
frighten the peasants into surrendering their grain, and in part the
result of administrative measures carried out in a clumsy—and therefore
frightening—way), Stalin was not on the road to complete collectivi-
ization yet, even in the summer of 1929. There were mentions of
collectivization in the press, there was more stress on the necessity for
collectivization, but the dominant tone was that of developing the
industries first. In the summer of 1929 the unbroken working week was
introduced in industry; workers were invited to join in socialist
emulation; managements were being exposed to the perils of criticism;
party officials were being purged, not so much for being Rightist, as for
not sufficiently pushing industrial production. Throughout the summer
of 1929, agriculture took a back seat; there was a food crisis, there were
ration cards, there were preparations for a grain procurement campaign;
but none of these was very important, compared with the development
of industry. (Though, of course, the main topic of the time was the
inhuman attitude of the Chinese government towards the Soviet citizens in China.)

There was a certain amount of collectivization; but it was carried out (or at least announced) in such a way as to show that the government were fully aware of the perils and difficulties which awaited them, should they attempt a complete collectivization. In September it was reported that 14% of the population in the North Caucasus had been collectivized and 10% in the Lower and Middle Volga, significantly, the regions where grain collections had met the greatest difficulties. In addition, four examples of successful collectivization were quoted:—

1. Armizonskii raion in the Urals, where 74% of the sown area had been collectivized, with about 78 households to each kolkhoz. The region had little agricultural machinery, but a large number of collectivized cattle, horses and smaller farm implements. Many kolkhozy were beginning to plough up virgin land without the aid of tractors.

2. Samoilovskii raion on the Lower Volga, where 25% of the land was collectivized. The collectivization was based on a tractor column of 36 tractors, which served 1,600 households (not kolkhozy—O.A.N.), and on a column of six tractors serving 200 households.

3. Mineralovodskii raion in the North Caucasus, where 40% of the population were collectivized. The western part of the raion was populated by Germans, the eastern part by a mixed population of Tatars, Bulgars,* Nogays and others. There was a small tractor column of twenty tractors, but many of these were out of order or obsolete.

4. Tiginskii raion in Severnaya oblast [sic!]. This was a district of dairy farming. Here collectivization was relatively easy, for it was a fairly industrialized, mechanized and electrified district.8

The examples quoted show that complete collectivization was carried out either in distant regions where a quantity of virgin land existed; or in districts where the population was not Russian; or finally, in districts with machinery available, which was being put to communal use. Apart from this detailed description, notices of collectivization with exact details were conspicuous by their absence in Pravda until the second half of October 1929, if not later.

Even the most ardent advocates of collectivization could not deny that there was not enough machinery to carry it out on a large scale.

* Presumably a misprint in the source for Balkars. Ed.

* Dr. Schlesinger in his article 'On the Scope of Necessity and Error', Soviet Studies, vol. XVII, no. 3 (January 1966), states that the course for industrialization was bound to mean collision with the private grower and entrepreneur. There is no reason to think, on the basis of his writings, that Stalin thought so till the beginning of November 1929. He required compliant producers, but did not identify them with collectivized producers.

7 ‘On the Road to Mass Collectivization’, Pravda, 12 September, 1929.

8 Ibid.
But above all, there were not enough men to help with the collectivization where it was being carried out. It may be, in Dr. Lewin’s words, that ‘The countryside was mobilized by thousands of agitators and activists of all sorts’.9 If this was so, then certainly Pravda had very little information on this campaign. It is true that in some districts there was some activity; in Bryanskii okrug workers’ brigades were preparing the peasants for collectivization in the period from 15 to 19 August, 1929. This short period of four days was devoted to arranging a communal harvest, so that the peasants would recognize the benefits of communal work.10 The peasants were to be eased into collectivization in other ways as well. On 6 September, 1929, the Central Committee passed a resolution to establish an annual day of ‘harvest and collectivization’ to be held on 14 October every year; this date was set to coincide with the holiday of Christ the Saviour, so as to discourage the peasants from attending church on that day.11 This day, the Central Committee considered, ought to be conducted as a mass campaign, somewhat in the manner of a production campaign in industry. But there were also articles which testified to the fact that, however much the Central Committee wished it could send thousands of activists into the countryside, it simply had none to spare. Even at the height of the collectivization fever, in mid-December, the commission on complete collectivization, which was then working, took two days to dispose of the problem of where to send the seven hundred graduates from Communist Vuzy and ten thousand ‘dvadtsatipyatitys-yachniki’, which was all the human material the government could spare at this crucial moment.12 While it was difficult to assemble this relatively unskilled apparatus of coercion at short notice, the matter of trained leaders for the future kolkhozy and sovkhozy seemed absolutely hopeless. An article in Pravda made this clear. The struggle for socialization of agriculture would require thousands of organizers and leaders, asserted the author. The socialized sector of agriculture was even at present badly in need of agronomists, specialists on mechanizing agriculture, organizers, engineers and managers of gigantic production units. The government had doubled the output of grain expected from the sovkhozy, and an enormous development of tractor stations was expected during the five-year plan. But the Commissariat of Education had raised its programme of admissions to the agricultural Vuzy only by 10% in 1932-33, compared with 1929. On the other hand, it was

9 Lewin, op. cit. p. 186.
10 Pravda, 13 October, 1929.
11 Ibid. 6 September, 1929.
12 N. A. Ivnitsky, ‘Istoriya podgotovki postanovleniya TsK VKP(b) o tempakh kollektivizatsii selskogo khozyaistva ot 5 yanvarya 1930 g., Istochnikovedenie istorii sovetskogo obshchestva (M. 1964), p. 277.
expected that artistic \textit{Vuzy} would have a 60\% rise in admissions in the same period. This was not all. Out of all the students admitted into agricultural \textit{Vuzy} in the RSFSR, only 15.7\% graduated (presumably the average for a number of years is meant). The truly Stalinist solution of making the pass rate higher was offered here, with better teaching methods coming a poor second.

Moreover, not a single new agricultural \textit{Vuzy} had been planned for the RSFSR during the five-year plan, while there were projects for a theatrical \textit{Vuzy}, a literary institute and other schools of cultural interest. In 1928–29, all the agricultural \textit{Vuzy} in the RSFSR had graduated 650 agronomist-cultivators; this number was insufficient even at present to fill the necessary posts. The number graduating in animal husbandry was 372. Even these small numbers were lowered in the plans for the year 1932–33. The matter of engineers was even worse. At the end of the five-year plan, twenty nine specialists in tractor construction would be graduated. By 1933 it was expected to graduate 130 agronomists specializing in large agricultural units (in contrast, 302 specialists of keyboard instruments and 209 singing specialists were envisaged). While Moscow oblast alone would need 357 agro-economists under the five-year plan, the output for the whole of the RSFSR was expected to be 360 people. Many more figures were quoted, all attesting to the impossibility of running a full-scale socialized agriculture under the existing cadre limitations.

All these circumstances made it plain that mass collectivization could not be carried out in the near future, and that there could not be any question of serious plans being made. But in the meantime the grain crisis was growing. This was the direct result of the poor crop (or poor procurements) after the 1928 harvest. There is some confusion about the 1928 crop. Some authorities (Dr. Lewin among others) state that the crop had been good, but the peasants were hiding the grain. Stalin at the 1929 April plenum said the poor procurements were the result of a bad year of drought and winter-killing. Jasny, a leading authority on Soviet agriculture, states clearly that the decline was the result of extensive winter-killing. Whatever the reasons for a poor harvest in 1928, the 1929 prospects were much better. Molotov reported to the First Moscow Oblast Party Conference on 14 September 1929 that the harvest was excellent, and that it was proposed to store 100 million puds of grain as a guarantee of economic growth. The only remaining task before the government was to collect this grain, grain procurements being the basis of the economic plan. There,

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{13}] 'Struggle for the Cadres', \textit{Pravda}, 25 August, 1929.
\item [\textsuperscript{14}] Stalin, op. cit. p. 256.
\item [\textsuperscript{16}] \textit{Pravda}, 20 September, 1929.
\end{itemize}
of course, lay the rub. Even if sufficient grain were to be grown, the difficulty lay in mustering sufficient means and forces to collect it.

Grain procurements

The problem facing the government was that the forced pace of industrialization undermined the possibility of agricultural expansion. There was not enough money or manpower in the country to force both; and it was industry that was to be forced. Therefore, agriculture had to be made to give up enough of its produce to guarantee the possibility of industrial development. The attention of the Central Committee turned towards the grain situation from July 1929 onwards. At first, with the promise of a good harvest, things seemed to be going reasonably well. The grain procurements were said to be coming in in August; and it was not till the end of August that Mikoyan sounded the first alarm. It might be as well to stop here for a moment and consider the campaign against free trade which, as Dr. Lewin pointed out, 'gravely disrupted the normal commercial network', but which he took to have been just another aspect of the class war. Despite the terror aspect of the wholesale arrests of traders and shutting down of free markets, this campaign was a practical step designed to prevent the peasants selling their grain at higher prices. This was clearly stated by Mikoyan in August 1929, when he called the free traders meshochniki, purely in War Communism tradition, to stress the state's strong attitude against the selling of grain at high prices. Nevertheless, the free traders were only part of the government's problems. It was not the private individuals who were sabotaging the plan for grain procurements, but the ineptitude of government agencies and their internal warfare, which made the targets unattainable. Mikoyan cited the instance of Soyuzkhleb and EPO (consumers' cooperatives), which were fighting with each other about who had the right to collect the contracted grain. In the same issue of Pravda, a correspondent from Armavir filled in the gaps that Mikoyan had left in his report. In this district, the agricultural cooperatives, which had a very weak organization, held the monopoly to collect contracted grain, while the well-organized apparatus of consumers' cooperatives had to collect what grain it could find by free-flow. The managers of EPO refused to collect the free-flow and were instead fighting a bitter battle with agricultural cooperatives for contracted grain, even going so far as to refuse to help with storage facilities for the grain already collected. This information and other reports about the inefficiency of government

17 Lewin, op. cit. p. 175.
18 Pravda, 24 August, 1929.
19 Ibid.
agencies do not square up with the picture presented by Dr. Lewin, who writes: ‘. . . the Party and the specialized services spent that year preparing, with a degree of energy and efficiency rarely to be encountered in other fields, for the procurement campaign, which in fact was to be more successful than ever before because of the unprecedented extent of the resources mobilized for the purpose’.

The alarm sounded by Mikoyan on 24 August was but a first sign of trouble. On 15 September, Pravda reported that the autumn sowing was going very badly, because the grain had not been prepared for sowing, and attributed it to the fact that the peasants were frightened to bring it to government seed-cleaning stations, as there had been some rumours that it would be taken away. The same issue also reported that in some districts only 17% of the procurement plan had been fulfilled. Part of this was due to the fact that the peasants, resisting procurements, were taking their grain secretly down the Volga to Stalingrad and Astrakhan, where they could sell it at high prices. But the local authorities must be blamed as well, since they were not speedy enough with grain collections and had not prepared sufficient storage space, transport, technical facilities; even such basic necessities as weighing machines were lacking in some places. From this day on, Pravda was full of tales of disaster. While the headlines spoke of breaking down the kulaks’ resistance (and very little attempt was made to conceal that this term covered all the peasants who refused to cooperate with the state), the correspondence underneath showed the extent to which the grain procurement plan was breaking down because of lack of organization. On 28 September came the first report of twelve wagons full of wheat rotting in railway sidings. Workers’ brigades, formed to help with procurements (another harking back to War Communism) went out into the countryside, only to send back letters of complaint that there were no storage, transport or any other facilities on the spot. Neither could the private growers be blamed any longer, for many kolkhozy and sovkhozy, alarmed at the extent of grain collections, were hiding their stores. Many kolkhozy were being disbanded as a punitive measure. By 5 October, Pravda announced in a big headline that grain procurements simply had to be fulfilled in October; they were going very badly all over the country, but particularly so in Siberia and in the Kuban area. Everywhere the kolkhozy were the worst offenders in fulfilling their quotas. Party officials in the localities were up in arms by that time; the Party Bureau of Zaporozh’e complained indignantly

21 Pravda, 15 September, 1929.
22 Ibid. 28 September, 1929.
23 Ibid. 29 September, 1929.
24 Ibid. 3 October, 1929.
that the plan ‘did not leave a single kilogram of grain for the population’. A secretary of the Bureau of the CC of the Ukraine was dismissed from his post for not pursuing the grain procurements energetically enough. The bad state of the procurements at this time is evident from the increasingly militant character of the campaign. In the North Caucasus the procurements were called ‘fines’ (shtrafy) and the local administration was applying them to all the peasants, rich and poor, but not alike—they were hitting the poor peasants hardest. The campaign had degenerated into utter chaos, and there was no one to check it. In and around Sverdlovsk, hundreds of wagons full of grain (at least 200-250 were arriving every day) were standing, waiting for further orders. All over the country, grain was rotting out in the open, because there was nowhere to put it. To counteract the opposition both of the peasants and, in some cases, of the local party authorities, the role of the workers’ brigades was put on a firmer footing; they were to become ‘responsible agents for procuring grain’, and were given full powers to proceed in large detachments (presumably it was not safe any longer to work in smaller groups—the work of one of those detachments is fully described) and to clear out district after district of grain. And finally, the use of force was given the formal seal of approval: ‘We must begin to work in a revolutionary way. Only in this way will October become the decisive month for grain procurements’; and for the first time it was admitted that it might be too late to go back to the status quo: too often grain procurements were looked upon as an end in themselves, and not as only one of the measures included in a whole complex of changes—industrialization of the country, collectivization of agriculture and other changes.

On 17 October 1929, Pravda stated for the first time that the grain procurements were not an end in themselves; on 22 October it carried the first realistic report (as opposed to the rather nebulous earlier ones) of a whole okrug which had been collectivized in a few days, and a mention that there were now twenty-five areas of mass collectivization in the country. As late as 10 October, there was a big article, indignantly denying that socialization of agriculture was to be quick, and that force would be used; a gradual transformation

25 Ibid. 5 October, 1929.
26 Dr. Schlesinger, op. cit. p. 359, also confirms this state of affairs: ‘But in some villages... up to 10% of the peasants got an “individual assessment”; in other cases the 3% were “made up” by inclusion of serednyaki’.
27 Pravda, 15 October, 1929.
28 Ibid. 16 October, 1929.
29 Ibid. 17 October, 1929.
30 Ibid. I am saying ‘for the first time’ since I have been unable to find an earlier mention linking procurements with collectivization. Lewin, op. cit. p. 188, places it on 31 October, 1929.
31 Pravda, 22 October, 1929.
was to be aimed at.32 Yet barely a fortnight later, it would appear that just such a collectivization was being enforced. What had happened during this short time? For several weeks, there had been constant newspaper reports of grain being set on fire by the peasants, and of grain-collecting officials being attacked. Despite a great degree of frankness in the newspaper reports, it would be perhaps too much to expect the full story from them. That is why it is necessary to resort to the report of a former Communist official, who claims to have been an eyewitness of the disorders:

Isolated peasant outbreaks within the country, in connection with ‘extraordinary measures’ taken to ensure grain collection in the autumn of 1929, were threatening to develop into mass peasant uprisings throughout the country. It was a repetition of the peasant uprisings of 1905, but without the support of the city workers and with the intellectuals silent and the outside world indifferent. Peasants armed with pitchforks hurled themselves at Soviet tanks, which received their first battle honours in the war against the people. Women threw themselves on the bayonets of the Chekists, children wept on the bodies of their dead parents, while tanks, cannon, machine-guns and bayonets collectivized some and liquidated others mercilessly and systematically.33

This author states unequivocally that it was the procurements which produced the peasant revolts, and not the collectivization. This is a picture which is consistent with the reports in Pravda. In the absence of an archival search, this claim cannot be made with complete certainty; but a very strong hypothesis must be put forward that the so-called ‘collectivization’ was, to start with, merely a series of punitive measures undertaken against the peasants who were opposing the confiscation of all their grain. Even so, disorders on such a large scale might have been avoided, had there not been constant proof before the peasants’ very eyes that the grain which had been brutally confiscated from them was rotting in open fields, in railway wagons, in churches, schools and even manure stores, for lack of storage space. Faced with starvation that very winter, while their precious grain was rotting away, it is hardly surprising that the Russian peasants took to rebellion. The punitive measures took the form of ploughing up the boundaries, to remind the peasants that in the last analysis it was the government which decided their fate. The additional measures of collectivizing livestock and farm buildings may have had a punitive character, but may also have been undertaken to stop the peasants from killing all the livestock and destroying all their buildings in despair. In addition, the city proletariat did not play such a passive role as Avtorkhanov ascribes to it. The proletariat, or part of it, were out in the

32 K. Tverskoi, 'Against Trotskyist Relapses', Pravda, 10 October, 1929.
countryside, actively helping the troops to requisition the grain, in
the hope of laying in stocks for the winter in their larders.

It must be assumed that the peasant war started sometime in mid-
October; it was not till 7 November, taking advantage of the anni-
versary of the Revolution, that Stalin proclaimed complete collectivi-
ization. But already on 1 November, Pravda made it clear that a sudden
and decisive turn in agricultural policy had been made: 'We are devel-
op ing mass collectivization in whole raions and okrugs. . . . Tens of
tractor columns are furrowing the peasant fields, are wiping out the
boundaries'. Workers' brigades were asked to convince the peasants
that they had to join the kolkhozy.34 Two days later an article appeared
which called 'For a decisive revision of plans on land consolidation'.
The five-year plan, the article stated, would have to be fulfilled in two
years. According to this change of plans, large collective farms would
have to play a decisive part in the country's economy. There was no
time to wait for ideal conditions, the time for consolidation was now.35
The author might have added: 'or never'.

The execution

It was with the background of a peasant war, either incipient or
already flaring, that the November plenum, described in detail by Dr.
Lewin,36 took place. Under the stress of the circumstances, since
Molotov plainly said that collectivization had to take place now, the
Central Committee decided to set up a commission on collectivization,
to 'see that the whole operation . . . was carried through in an orderly
manner'.37 However, the commission was not finally constituted till
8 December 1929, a delay which Dr. Lewin finds puzzling. The delay
seems perfectly natural though, when we consider that there must have
been a great deal of confusion in the capital and lack of reports from the
districts which were being 'pacified'; and that very few members of the
government believed that anything in the nature of a real collectiviz-
ation could possibly be achieved. Their hesitation is not very surprising,
for they had an inkling of the situation and could not be blamed
for thinking that a country without enough weighing machines or
clerks to register the grain collected from the peasants was not an ideal
ground for a process as complex as collectivization of even half the
cultivated area.

The commission to 'develop complete collectivization' was set up
at the beginning of December 1929, under the chairmanship of the

34 Pravda, 1 November, 1929.
35 V. P'er, 'For a Decisive Revision of Plans on Land Consolidation', Pravda, 3 November, 1929.
36 Lewin, op. cit. p. 189.
37 Ibid.
Commissar for Agriculture, Ya. A. Yakovlev. Its members were members and candidate-members of the CC, secretaries of kraikoms and obkoms, representatives of central institutions. The first meeting, which was held on 8 December, set up eight sub-commissions; these were to deal with the speed of collectivization, type of economy in collectivized regions, organizational problems, distribution of resources, cadres, mobilization of peasant property, relations with the kulaks, and other matters. The management of the USSR Kolkhoztsentr, with G. N. Kaminsky at the head, were given the problem of the pace of collectivization, with the proviso that collectivization was to be completed in two to three years in grain-producing regions and was to end during the five-year plan in other regions. A sub-commission consisting of K. Ya. Bauman, I. E. Klimenko, T. R. Ryskulov and G. N. Kaminsky was to work out the problem of relations with the kulaks. To help in its estimates on the speed of collectivization, the commission prepared a summary of the collectivization already achieved by 15 December 1929 (see Table). The figures were incomplete and, in addition, data for twenty-two okrugs, five oblasts, three ‘otdel’nye raions’ and two autonomous republics were missing. Even the existing data are rather dubious according to Ivnitsky, who states that:

In the assessment of these data, it must be borne in mind that, firstly, it is known that the data were not complete, since in a series of okrugs some were missing; secondly, a certain over-assessment shown in the table must be taken into account. For instance in the Uzbek SSR at the end of 1929 there was not a single raion in which more than 50% of peasant households were in kolkhozy, but Table No. 1 shows one raion (in the Bukhara okrug) with a level of more than 70% collectivization. There are also other errors. On the whole, however, despite some over-assessments, the Table gives a more or less correct picture of kolkhoz construction in the middle of December 1929.

In view of such uncertainty by a leading Soviet authority on the subject, it would be futile to attempt any guesses at the exact level of collectivization in mid-December; all that one can say is that it was not very high, and certainly nowhere near complete or almost complete, except in one or two districts.

Two problems exercised the commission’s ingenuity most of all: the first dealt with the speed of collectivization; the second with the relations with the kulaks. It would appear that Yakovlev warned the commission that undue haste would not only lead to frightening the peasants, but also to the ‘substitution of real collectivization by show collectivization, formal collectivization, which we do not want’. Deep double meaning need not be read into this opinion; it seems certain that Yakovlev meant exactly what he said; that is, not that the

38 Ivnitsky, op. cit. p. 266. 39 Ibid. pp. 266-7. 40 Ibid. p. 269. 41 Ibid. p. 271.
AND COLLECTIVIZATION

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* i.e. percentage of households collectivized.

peasants would be terrorized into joining the kolkhozy (though he said that as well), but simply that local officials would be forced to show on paper levels of collectivization which the hard facts did not bear out. Another faction (and here Ivnitsky names B. P. Sheboldaev) apparently went all out for the notion that there was a strong desire from below to form kolkhozy, and that there was no need to hold it back. Yakovlev was accused of taking the side of those ‘who wanted to temporize’. The initial draft of the project was sent to the Politbureau on 22 December; the pace of collectivization was set according to Yakovlev’s position. The draft was accompanied, however, by an amendment which T. R. Ryskulov sent directly to Stalin, and later to Ordzhonikidze. This amendment suggested that the pace outlined by the commission was not quick enough and proposed a maximum pace, with particular inclusion of districts with technical crops (about which Stalin was beginning to be seriously worried); and, following this, the forcing of the pace in Central Asia, the cotton-growing territory. The whole project was returned to the commission, who were told to amend it in line with Ryskulov’s proposals. We need not dwell here on the question whether Ryskulov worked on his own initiative, or whether he was ordered to table the amendment by Stalin himself, though it is possible that an archival search would clear this up.

The problem of dealing with the kulaks was the one which had the strongest bearing on the outcome of the struggle, for while it was quite certain that actual, positive collectivization could not be achieved with the small means at hand, the commission had no doubt that, provided the government were prepared to send out the armed forces in strength, the opposing kulaks could be liquidated. The sub-committee under the chairmanship of K. Ya. Bauman suggested that in the regions of mass collectivization all kulak means of production should be confiscated and transferred to the kolkhozy. ‘This process of de-kulakization . . . is completely different from de-kulakization under War Communism, when kulak wealth passed to individual peasant households.’ suggested the commission. But expropriation and condemnation to death were not to go hand in hand. The sub-committee stated clearly that it would be hopeless to try to solve the kulak problem by deporting the ‘whole masses of kulak population’ to distant regions, or to solve it by similar means (thus admitting that it was not merely a matter of dealing with a few hundred thousand richer peasants, but with

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42 Ibid. p. 272.
43 Ibid. p. 278.
44 Despite pressure exerted on him, Yakovlev himself was convinced that it would be impossible to collectivize without additional machinery and remarked that means should be found to make 120,000 tractors available; and if necessary, to buy additional ones abroad, as it would take at least 5-6 years to construct a technical base in Russia, ibid. pp. 276-7.
large strata of peasant population). It was therefore suggested that only those kulaks who actively opposed the socialist order or who carried out counter-revolutionary work should be arrested or deported; that those kulaks who opposed mass collectivization should be deported or transferred (pereseleny)—a subtle difference, but one which could mean the difference between life and death; and, finally, that the majority of the kulak population should be allowed to work in the new kolkhozy for three to five years without pay and without franchise; after which those passing the test would be allowed to become full members of the kolkhozy.

This more lenient course was advocated by K. Ya. Bauman, G. N. Kaminsky, T. R. Ryskulov, I. E. Klimenko and M. N. Belenkoi. However, other members were in favour of completely excluding the kulaks from kolkhozy; among them was I. M. Vareikis, who, on the strength of his experience in the Central Black-Earth Region, advocated deportation of all the kulaks, or transferring them to the very worst districts; or, finally, not allowing them even the smallest plot of the worst soil. The decree of the Politbureau took this last point of view and stated that kulaks were not to be accepted into kolkhozy anywhere at all, and not only in the districts of mass collectivization. This wording of the decree (which Ivnitsky suggests was inspired by Stalin) made it relatively simple to justify the mass deportations of peasants, which Stalin felt were necessary after the disorders.

Another matter which was discussed by the commission was the question of peasant property and the form which collectivization would take. Here again, most members of the various sub-commissions were in favour of leaving some property in private hands; but Ryskulov expressed the opinion that unless the peasants were made to surrender all their property to the kolkhozy, they would be tempted to opt out of them at a later date. Ryskulov’s viewpoint, as well as the deliberate choice of the artel’ form of kolkhoz, because it did not leave the means of production in private hands, were approved by Stalin, thus, in Ivnitsky’s words: ‘witnessing his disregard of the interests of working peasantry....’ Since Stalin settled most of the outstanding questions in accordance with his own views (and it is quite possible that he believed that no other way out remained), and since time was pressing, the commission did not deliberate for a long time. Less than a month passed from the first meeting in December to the issuing of the decree ‘About the pace of collectivization, and measures of government help for kolkhoz construction’ on 5 January 1930.

What happened as far as collectivization proper was concerned in the months from January to March 1930 does not lie within the scope
of this paper. Under the best climatic conditions, collectivization would have been a difficult matter. In the hard Russian winter, when many districts are cut off for months, this operation appears to be almost impossible. Adding to these natural factors the breakdown of civilian administration, and a virtual civil war, one can only conclude that any action which was carried out that winter was mainly punitive. But, probably thanks to the pressure on local officials, Stalin got his figures by March: it was announced that 58.1% of peasant households were collectivized. As soon as the pressure was eased, this figure was reduced to 23.6% in June 1930, thus being very near to the average of the tentative figures collected by the collectivization commission in December 1929.

Was there a collectivization?

Careful piecing together of this new information, together with the older evidence, must lead us to ask the question whether a mass collectivization had been planned by Stalin, if not as early as the XV Congress, then at least as late as the April plenum in 1929. The answer must be in the negative. Every piece of evidence suggests strongly that while Stalin (in line with most other Bolshevik leaders) believed that a certain degree of collectivization would be necessary under the five-year plan, in order to ensure a constant supply of food to the industrial centres, he had no intention, as late as the beginning of October 1929, of carrying out anything so drastic as even a 25% collectivization. He knew very well that even if he wanted to do so, the means at hand were pitifully inadequate. On the other hand, he believed (erroneously, as it turned out) that he had sufficient means of persuasion and coercion to 'squeeze' every bit of grain out of the peasants, in order to guarantee the industrial expansion. His miscalculation was due to lack of reliable information about the state of provincial administration. It was the incompetence of the local administration in carrying out the grain procurements, together with the lack of technical means and transport and storage facilities, which set off the peasant revolts. Once these revolts had occurred, some way had to be found of cloaking them under the overall term of 'counter-revolution'. Very little ingenuity was needed to show that the peasants were rebelling against collectivization and not against grain procurements; and this was in fact done, thus confusing not only the peasants themselves, but also serious students of the situation. Stalin needed this excuse desperately, not so much to protect himself from the population, as to protect himself from both the Central Committee and the

50 Figures quoted by M. Fainsod, How Russia is Ruled, Revised ed. (London, 1963), p. 531. Fainsod himself states that the new collective farms were paper organizations.
expelled opposition leaders, who had for two years been predicting just such an event.\textsuperscript{51}

The commission, set up on the face of it to discuss collectivization, never seriously contemplated this task. Instead, it was forced to give a seal of approval to the measures taken to quell the peasants, such as arrests, deportations and confiscation of property, all done on a scale undreamt of in War Communism days. Even when the worst was over, in March 1930, Stalin still needed the assurance that the Central Committee was with him, as is witnessed by his denial on 30 April that 'the article “Giddiness from Success” was written on Stalin’s personal initiative. This, of course, is nonsense. The Central Committee does not exist in order to allow personal initiative by anyone. . . .'\textsuperscript{52} If it is true that Stalin’s position was so weak at this time, it might be objected that his enemies would have taken advantage of it and deposed him. This must have been more than a passing thought in many a mind. But there was an obstacle—in the face of a peasant rebellion, the ruling class as a whole was in danger. The year 1928 had already demonstrated plainly that even the former idols could no longer count on the support of the proletariat which had once followed them gladly. Faced with the choice of Stalin’s rule and a peasant revolution, even Trotsky chose Stalin. In addition, Stalin was the best person to subdue a rebellion; rightly, none of the other leaders felt that they could be quite so ruthless and methodical as he was. It was the fear of a full-scale peasant revolution (whether real or imagined, it is difficult to say without full data, though Avtorkhanov asserts that there were fears that a Pugachev would arise at any moment), which made the commission on collectivization assent to Stalin’s drastic measures; it was the same fear that made the Central Committee mute, despite a realization that the collectivization was a sham and that it was only invoked in order to subdue the rising peasant masses.

When the worst danger was over, the war could be relaxed a little in the spring, since it was time to induce the surviving peasants to start to work on the land again. It is immaterial whether Stalin himself or the Central Committee wrote the article on relaxation; what is important is that both parties knew that what had happened during the winter was not a collectivization at all. This would have to be built up far more painfully in the following few years, after the price of the 1929 blunder had been paid in famine and industrial catastrophe.

\textit{University of Manchester} \hspace{1cm} O. A. \textsc{Narkiewicz}

\textsuperscript{51} Avtorkhanov, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 159-60, relates in a loose but convincing way the confusion and anti-Stalinist currents in the Central Committee during the winter of 1929-30.

\textsuperscript{52} Stalin, quoted by Avtorkhanov, \textit{ibid.}, p. 160. Avtorkhanov asserts that ‘Giddiness from Success’ had not been written of Stalin’s free will, but was dictated to him by the ‘deathly frightened Central Committee’, whose members told Stalin to sort out the situation by himself.