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The Bolshevik Sowing Committees of 1920

Apotheosis of War Communism?

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In December 1920, on the eve of the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP), the Bolsheviks embarked on a crash campaign to avert an agricultural crisis. The Eighth Congress of Soviets passed legislation known by the name of one of its principal innovations, the sowing committees (posevkomy).[1] The usual view of this legislation is that it was a last binge of revolutionary inebriation before the sobering morning after of NEP — a desperate attempt to use civil-war methods to undo the damage done by civil-war methods. The full record of the legislation and the debate surrounding it tell a different story.[2]

The Situation In 1920

Despite the flare-ups of armed conflict in Poland and the Crimea, the Bolsheviks had started to think in terms of postwar reconstruction by spring 1920. But even though the civil war was almost over, the economic emergency was not. Lenin summed up the situation, giving the Donbass as an example: "There is no bread because there is no coal, and no coal because there is no bread. . . . We have to break through this damnable chain by using our energy, pressure [nazhim], and the heroism of the toilers, so that all the machines start turning."[3] This meant that the extra-economic methods of the civil war could not be abandoned just yet; until "the factories began to turn," the basis for normal economic relations between town and village simply did not exist.

Bolshevik thinking in 1920 was dominated by the search for ways to break the "damnable chain" and take the final step from a time of troubles to a time of peace and reconstruction. The sowing-committee scheme was put forward in the autumn of 1920 as a way of taking that final step in agriculture. It was defended as an ingenious way of helping agriculture within the constraints imposed by the economic emergency. But the constraints were not only objective, for they included long-standing policy

commitments of the Bolsheviks. Since these subjective constraints are widely misunderstood, we must examine them briefly before going on to the details of the sowing-committee legislation.[4] Three distinctions must be made:

1. Coercion versus exchange. At no time did the Bolsheviks believe that coercion was preferable to exchange as a basis for their dealings with the peasantry. The principled preference for exchange was symbolized by the metaphorical description of the grain levy — the *razverstka* — as a loan. Among the many Bolshevik statements on this point is Trotsky's in 1920:

> Had not the country been so exhausted, and if the proletariat had the possibility of offering to the peasant masses the necessary quantity of commodities and cultural requirements, the adaption of the toiling majority of the peasantry to the new regime would have taken place much less painfully. [So] the proletariat demanded of the peasantry the granting of food credits, economic subsidies in respect of values which it is only now to create. . . . But the peasant mass is not very capable of historical detachment.[5]

2. State monopoly versus free trade. All Bolsheviks in 1920 were firmly committed to the state grain monopoly, but since the grain monopoly and free trade in grain were simply two different ways of organizing exchange, this commitment says nothing about the role of coercion. What needs to be stressed here is that the commitment to the grain monopoly was no aberration of "War Communism," since it predated not only the civil war but even the revolution.

3. *Razverstka* versus food-supply tax. Although there was Bolshevik consensus on the grain monopoly, there was a lively debate on the relative merits of the *razverstka* versus food-supply tax. Since the food-supply tax was introduced in spring 1921 at the same time as the decriminalization of free trade, there is a tendency to equate the two issues. Yet they are distinct, and in fact in 1920 no advocate of the food-supply tax publicly supported free trade. The *razverstka* was a method of enforcing the grain monopoly under the constraints of a scarcity of exchange items and an

undeveloped administrative apparatus. It was designed to work with exchange items if possible but without them if necessary. The food-supply officials insisted on the distinction between the monopoly principle and the *razverstka method.* This meant that the commitment to the *razverstka* was much more conditional than the commitment to the monopoly.

To these subjective constraints must be added the objective difficulties of the devastated Russian economy. It is sometimes said that the main problem for Russian agriculture was the Bolshevik insistence on taking the entire surplus production, thus removing any incentive for expanded production. This is an oversimplified and misleading assertion. The agricultural crisis of 1920 went deeper than a matter of incentives: force can provide an incentive, if only a blunt one. The crisis was caused not by what the Bolsheviks took from agriculture, but their inability —or, as the peasants saw it, their refusal — to return anything. By 1920, the difficulty was not that the peasants refused to produce a surplus — it was increasingly that they could not produce one. Six long years of the absorption of industrial output by the military, six years of using equipment without any renewal, had led to a fatal weakening of agriculture's productive base.

As the civil war drew to a close, industry could once again begin to supply the needs of agriculture. But the workers had to eat, and this required taking grain from the peasants once again without compensation. This was the unpleasant situation from which N. Osinskii (Valerian Obolenskii) proposed an escape route in a series of articles in *Pravda* starting on September 5, 1920.[6] Osinskii is one of those second-level Bolshevik figures that never come into focus as long as we use the clumsy categories of "left" and "right," or "War Communism" and "NEP." In 1918, he was one of the Left Communists, a Bolshevik grouping that some writers have seen as war communists avant la letter. In 1920, he was one of the leaders of the "democratic centralists." This oppositional group is associated with protests against bureaucratic degeneration in state and party and the excessive power granted to "bourgeois specialists." Later in the year, Osinskii became the main proponent of the sowing committees,

generally viewed as the apotheosis of the bureaucratic utopianism of War Communism.

In spring 1921, Osinskii became an ardent supporter of NEP: he was the inventor of the phrase, "seriously and for a long time." Lenin even felt it necessary to chide him for his excessively pessimistic view of the length of time before socialism would be possible.[7] Later in the year, he insisted that trade relations be extended to heavy industry, thereby earning the reputation of a leader of a "bourgeois reaction" to the difficulties of early NEP policies.[8] From late 1931 to 1935, Osinskii was head of the statistical administration, and his tenure is still remembered as a brief respite from the Stalinist adulteration of statistical probity.[9] According to the normal stereotypes, Osinskii appears a very unstable fellow: now on the left, now on the right, now protesting against "glavkism" (chief-committee-ism), now setting up new *glavki* for agriculture. A closer look and a different set of categories will bring the Osinskii of 1920-1921 into focus; we will see that from Osinskii's point of view, his advocacy of democratic centralism, of the sowing committees, and of NEP all fit together.

In his *Pravda* articles, Osinskii analyzed the causes of the incipient agricultural crisis, reviewed the constraints imposed on any government response, and strongly urged an all-out campaign to ward off the crisis. At the end of October, the Politburo took up the suggestion and asked for legislation to be prepared in time for the Eighth Congress of Soviets in December 1920. Osinskii was at this time a member of the collegium of the Commissariat of Food Supply, and in general the food-supply officials were the most enthusiastic proponents of his scheme. The draft prepared by Osinskii met with some coolness from the Commissariat of Agriculture, however, and agriculture officials published criticisms of the legislation in a lively press debate prior to the Eighth Congress.

The top Bolshevik leadership, and Lenin in particular, gave strong support to the draft that evolved out of consultation between the Commissariats of Food Supply and Agriculture and then presented to the Eighth Congress. Menshevik and SR spokesmen present at the congress chal-

lenged the legislation's reliance on coercion as part of an overall critique of Bolshevik food-supply policy, although they did not go so far as to advocate legalizing free trade. There was also a revolt within the Bolshevik caucus, where the majority felt that parts of the legislation would strengthen the position of the rich peasants, or kulaks. It took Lenin's personal intervention, plus some concessions on legislative language, to beat back this revolt.

The sowing-committee legislation was duly passed by the Congress and went immediately into effect. (The preamble to the legislation is translated in the Appendix). The transition to NEP did not end the agricultural crisis by any means, and so the sowing committees remained on the job for another year, trying to mitigate the effects of the drought and to ensure the largest possible harvest in 1921 and 1922.

Two Approaches To The Peasantry

The legislation, like any initiative in agricultural policy, rested on a particular view of the peasantry: its motivations, its internal relations, its prospects for development. In order to put the views of Osinskii and his supporters into context, it will be helpful to describe two outlooks on the peasantry, which I will call the "class-struggle outlook" and the "partnership outlook." (See Chart 1.) In their pure forms, these two views are two ends of a spectrum along which we can locate the actual views of Bolshevik policy-makers.

According to the class-struggle view, the peasantry is divided (or is rapidly becoming divided) into two groups: proto-proletariat and proto-capitalist. Because of the intensity of the struggle between them, political motivations take primacy over economic motivations. If, for example, the peasants do not market their grain, it is interpreted as a "grain strike" meant to choke the revolution with the bony hand of hunger. This implies

Chart 1. Class-Struggle Outlook versus Partnership Outlook

Class Struggle	Partnership
Peasantry is divided into rich/poor (or kulak/bedniak)	Peasantry is divided into industrious/lazy (or starateInyi/lodyr)
Peasantry will soon dissolve into bourgeois and proletarians (rassloenie)	Peasantry will remain a distinct group for the foreseeable future
Political motivations	Economic motivations
Sabotage	Objective difficulties
Firm alliance only after socialist transformation	Firm alliance with present single-owner production relations
Socialist consciousness as goal ("conscious" discipline of socialist worker)	State consciousness as goal (necessity of sacrificing for the common good)

Note: Material incentives versus coercion should not be included in this contrast. Material incentives can be used in class struggles – for example, the Committees of the Poor were promised a share of the grain they confiscated. Similarly, coercion can be part of a partnership strategy – for example, any compulsory tax to obtain a public good.

that pressing practical problems are caused by sabotage; therefore, crushing sabotage is the basic method of solving these problems. In contrast, the partnership view portrays the peasantry as homogeneous, with economic motivations dominant and objective difficulties as the basic cause of practical problems.

This central contrast leads to many others. What the class-struggle view regards as a division between evil rich and virtuous poor is seen by the partnership view as a division between the industrious peasant and the lazy one. The class-struggle view maintains that only socialist transformation will turn the peasant into a firm ally of the revolution, while the partnership view maintains that the peasantry's firm support is possible under present production relations. The class-struggle view aims at instilling a socialist consciousness among the peasantry, while the partnership view would be satisfied with a "state consciousness" – that is, a realization that personal welfare depends on the general welfare and a willingness in consequence to make sacrifices in support of the general welfare..

If we apply this framework to the sowing-committee legislation, the first thing we see is a new peasant hero and villain: no longer the *bedniak* versus the *kulak,* but the industrious owner *(staratelnyi khoziain*) versus the lazy lout (lodyr). Osinskii argued that the aim of state regulation should be to universalize the standards of the industrious owner, and Lenin called the legislation a "wager on the industrious" – a revealing allusion to the Stolypin program.[10] The enemy within the peasantry was not so much the kulak as the "the benighted, the backward, and the feckless," as a high official of the Commissariat of Agriculture, I. A. Teodorovich, put it at the Eighth Congress. Teodorovich went on to say that the time of division (*rassloenie*) was over, and it was no longer a question of proletariat versus petty-bourgeois, but of partnership with the "middle laboring [*trudovoi*] peasantry."[11] (The use of the adjective "laboring" is significant, since it was associated with the SRs and had been rejected with scorn by the Bolsheviks when they broke with the Left SRs in 1918.)

Although one aim of the legislation was to provide poor peasant households with seed in the interests of increasing sown acreage, the Bolsheviks were at pains to disassociate themselves with any suggestion of class struggle – even to the extent of dropping the term "poor" in favor of "weak" (*malomoshchnyi*).[12] V. V. Kuraev gave the following advice on

how this part of the legislation could be made palatable to the middle peasant who resented the poor peasant because of the material burden he caused. The middle peasant should be told that in loaning seed grain he is not helping the poor peasant but helping the state, that is, the general interest in a restoration of the economy. The middle peasant has an immediate material stake as well: the chance of lowering his personal burden in the *razverstka* of 1921. It is this sort of appeal that will be "comprehensible and convincing." The agitator should rely on the peasant's own distinction between the lazy lout and the worthy hard-working poor who simply had a bad break. The middle peasant should also be assured that in the future the decisive figure in the village will be the industrious owner.[13] Thus the Bolsheviks were actively advertising the outlook behind their legislation as a peasant outlook rather than a revolutionary one.

Tied to the glorification of the industrious owner was a rejection of state farms, collective farms and communes as either a solution to the immediate crisis or as the high road to socialism in the countryside. Lenin sneeringly referred to the collective farms as almshouses and asserted that "we must rely on the single-owner [*edinolichny*] peasant – that's the way he is and he won't be different in the near future. To dream of a transition to socialism and collectivization won't do."[14] Iurii Larin wrote that the state farms (*sovkhozy*) and the collective farms (*kolkhozy*) had to take second place to the "*krekhozy*" – his new coinage for the ordinary peasant farm: "For today and tomorrow, in order to raise production *in the mass*, we must deal with the existing *krekhozy*, with the material and human resources now available. . . . Otherwise we will see nothing in 1921 or 1922 but confused experiments."[15] In early 1921, official instructions for party propaganda drove the point home: "Nothing could be more dangerous than if some overambitious agitator decided to explain it [the sowing-committee legislation] as a new way of communizing the peasantry. That would factually be incorrect, since the state's help is being given to the single-owner peasant enterprise."[16]

Thus when Osinskii analyzed the agricultural crisis of 1920, he pointedly did not include the absence of socialized productive forms among the causes, but instead concentrated on objective difficulties such as the industrial collapse and the ravages of the civil war.[17] Prior to the end of the civil war, there had been a widespread feeling among Bolsheviks that the peasants had gained more and suffered less from the revolution than the workers, but Bolshevik leaders admitted that by late 1920 the relative position of workers and peasants had been reversed.[18] In his discussion of the reasons for this reversal, Osinskii argued that the self-subsistent independence of the peasant economy was easily exaggerated and the peasant could not remain unaffected by industry's inability to supply his needs.

Osinskii also admitted that the pressure exerted through the *razverstka* had contributed to the crisis, especially in the long-suffering central agricultural region. Osinskii felt that the Bolsheviks were compelled to apply this pressure in order to achieve victory in a just cause, but still, "facts are facts" — it was impossible to deny that civil-war pressures had caused grave damage to agriculture.[19] Bolshevik leaders were both proud of the accomplishments of the Commissariat of Food Supply and aware of the immense cost of the achievement. In Lenin's words:

> The real foundation of the economy is the food-supply reserve. And here the success has been great [and] we can now set about restoring the economy. We know that this success has been achieved at the cost of great deprivations and hunger in the peasantry [and] we know that a year of drought has sharpened these disasters. . . . For that reason we are putting primary emphasis on measures of help as set out in this legislation.[20]

Given this miserable economic position, Osinskii argued, the peasant felt two contradictory impulses: the "healthy instinct of a business-like laborer [*khoziaistvenno-trudovoi*]" to fight the crisis, and the demoralizing urge of the lazy lout to exploit it.[21] Osinskii called the lazy lout's response "sabotage," thus employing one of the key terms of the class-struggle outlook. But Osinskii was not trying to incite the poor against the rich, but to

incite the hard-working taxpayer against the parasite who increased his fellow-villagers' material burden by refusing to sow (or doing so in a sloppy manner) and selling what grain he had on the black market rather than contributing to the village's collective *razverstka* obligation. In the words of a publication of the Commissariat of Food Supply: "The person who is a lazy lout – who squanders his seed material and doesn't want to improve his working methods – who leaves his field unsown – will be considered a criminal hurting the common cause, and he won't be handled tenderly either by the state or by his more hardworking neighbors."[22]

The partnership view did not expect the peasant to attain a socialist consciousness. Lenin argued that support for the sowing-committee legislation did not require a socialist transformation. On the contrary, the message that "the laboring middle and poor peasant is a friend of soviet authority, and the lazy lout is its enemy" was "the truth plain and simple, in which there is nothing socialist, but which is so obvious and indisputable [that it will be accepted] at any peasant meeting."[23] No doubt even a state consciousness was an unrealistic goal at the time (although many Bolsheviks convinced themselves otherwise), but it still required less of a break with peasant tradition to accept the necessity of compulsory sacrifice for the public good than to become committed socialists.

The Bolshevik leaders' explanation and defense of the sowing-committee legislation thus reveals a shift from the class-struggle view of the peasant to the partnership view. The replacement of poor/rich by industrious/lazy, the rejection of *sovkhozy* and *kolkhozy* in favor of *krekhozy*, the emphasis on objective difficulties rather than politically-motivated sabotage, and the goal of state consciousness rather than socialist consciousness all attest to this shift. Of course, as the use of words like "sabotage" showed, Bolshevik policy-makers did not make a clean break with the assumptions of their past outlook.[24] The Bolsheviks were able to explain their shift in perspective while retaining their vocabulary of class division by talking about the new prominence of the "middle peasant [*seredniak*]." But the objective process of "middle-ization" of the

peasantry was less important than the subjective shift in the Bolsheviks' own outlook.

The Bolshevik's new view of the peasantry corresponded to a new view of themselves as a national leadership rather than a class or revolutionary leadership. These two views of themselves could coexist or intertwine in various ways, but the agricultural crisis of 1920, like the civil war preceding it, tended to strengthen the national view. A remarkable manifestation of this tendency occurred in a *Pravda* article in September 1920:

> Hunger is the common enemy. It does not distinguish between parties and convictions. It tortures in similar fashion the worker, the intellectual, the communist, the Menshevik, and the nonparty people.... Let all citizens of Russia close ranks behind the soviet authority, and it will be able to defeat hunger as well.[25]

Motivations

In their explanation and defence of the sowing-committee legislation, the Bolsheviks put an extraordinary emphasis on coercion (*prinuzhdenie*). This gave an excellent opportunity to the critics of the Bolsheviks; at the Eighth Congress, for instance, David Dallin called on the Bolsheviks to choose either coercion or partnership (*soglashenie*) with the peasants.[26] Lenin's response was exasperated:

> We certainly don't claim that we are doing things without mistakes. [But] neither the Mensheviks nor the SRs say, "here is the need and misery of the peasants and workers, and here is the way to lift ourselves out of this misery." No, they don't say that – they only say that what *we* are doing is coercion.

And if the peasants objected they were being made to "work for Tsiurupa" (the Commissar of Food Supply), Lenin's response was "quit

joking, and answer the question directly: how would *you* restore industry?"[27]

The Bolsheviks' assertion that coercion and assistance could be combined is theoretically better founded than Dallin's argument that a choice had to be made between the use of coercion and the partnership view. This can best be demonstrated using the modern vocabulary of public goods. Economic recovery was a public good, which meant that everybody would benefit from it whether or not they contributed to its achievement. This leads to a paradox that should be familiar to anyone who has experienced fund-raising telethons for public broadcasting: even though it would be in each individual's self-interest to make the sacrifice necessary to attain the public good, it would be even more advantageous to let other people make the sacrifice and enjoy the public good without cost. Besides, the individual's sacrifice will be useless unless there is some guarantee that enough other people will also make the sacrifice. The consequent reluctance to make voluntary sacrifices leads to the counter-intuitive conclusion that coercion may be necessary to achieve what is in everyone's direct material interest.[28]

It is necessary to review this logic, if only to emphasize that the conceptual vocabulary for demonstrating it in convincing fashion hardly existed in 1920 and was certainly not available to the Bolsheviks. Furthermore, many historians seem to share the idea that coercion *per se* is a bad thing — even though most of these historians support programs of coercive regulation aimed at achieving public goods in their own societies.

Despite the rhetorical emphasis on coercion, Osinskii and his supporters knew from experience that coercion did not work efficiently in a vacuum. Osinskii intended the sowing-committee campaign to rely on a package of all three main types of motivation — coercion, material incentive, and persuasion. His dispute with his critics was not over what type of motivation to use, but over the most expedient way to combine these motivations in the difficult circumstances of 1920.[29]

Osinskii defined the problem as follows: "now can we unite state procurement of food products and raw materials with single-owner peasant enterprise, given the weakness of our reserves of commodity goods [*tovarnyi fond*]?"[30] The first step was to supplement the available material incentives in any way possible. One way was to mobilize city workers to help with repairs, harvest labor, and other village activities. This campaign, started in spring 1920 under the name "week of the peasant," was enthusiastically endorsed by Evgenii Preobrazhenskii: "We must demonstrate to the village that the Soviet authority takes the peasant's surplus, while giving for the present almost nothing in return, only because of its poverty. . . . The 'week of the peasant' should be the beginning of this payment for grain and for labor services [*povinnosti*]."[31] Another possible method of strengthening material incentives was increasing the security of peasant property by ending frequent land redistribution.[32] In what turned out to be the most controversial provision of the legislation, incentives were also offered to the individual industrious peasant in the form of bonuses and an increased consumer norm (the amount left to the peasant after the *razverstka*).

A massive agitation campaign was also planned to convince the peasant that the demands placed on him would redound to his own benefit. Lenin was particularly interested in this aspect of the program, and he argued that unlike bourgeois governments, the dictatorship of the proletariat was strong because it knew how to combine coercion with persuasion (*ubezhdenie*). For his part, Osinskii stressed that agitational campaigns would be ineffective unless combined with material help and pressure on the lazy lout.[33]

The Bolshevik leaders had managed to convince themselves that coercion would be accepted as an integral part of this aid package. Lenin asserted that the essence of the legislation was that the measures of practical help consisted not only of encouragement (*pooshchrenie*) but coercion as well. In Lenin's vocabulary, there was a clear distinction between coercion (*prinuzhdenie*) and violence (*nasilie*). The violence used by the

White Guard governments violated the interests of the peasant; the Bolsheviks would also be guilty of violence if they tried to force the peasants to enter the communes (*kommuniia*).[34]

On the basis of his experience in Tula province, Osinskii wrote in June 1920 that:

> no one can say now that the Soviet authority only takes grain from the village without a thought for the future and giving nothing in return. We are not only taking grain, we are organizing further production; even more, we are compelling the proper sowing of the land and cutting off any sabotage in that regard.[35]

If sowing to less than the fullest extent possible was "sabotage," then ending this sabotage directly benefitted the industrious owner because of the restoration of industry and because of reduced individual shares of the 1921 *razverstka* burden. The pressure on the lazy lout also had psychological significance, since it showed the industrious owner that the soviet authority was on his side as well as weakening the demoralizing example of the lazy lout getting rich through speculation.[36]

Coercion also allowed the state to provide organizational help. Alek-sei Sviderskii, a top food-supply official, argued that since the state would not be able for some time to provide the material preconditions of advanced agriculture such as tractors and electricity, the only means now available to lead the country out of economic ruin was the state's "organizational strength." The state did not itself have any seed reserves, for example, but it could gather up the scattered resources of the peasantry and redistribute the available seed to achieve the greatest effect possible.[37]

During the actual sowing campaign in spring 1921, Osinskii gave more concrete guidance on the application of "reasonable coercion." Even though the food-supply tax strengthened the possibility of a partnership with the peasants, it did not end the necessity for coercion. It was not the job of the sowing committees themselves to arrest or fine peasants; their job was rather to warn the peasants of the consequences of their actions

and to check up on their performance. After the campaign was concluded, the officials would inform the courts that so-and-so had speculated with seed grain rather than sowing, that so-and-so did not use his own resources to their fullest because of laziness, and that so-and-so refused to sow a particular crop for self-interested reasons. The courts would go into the circumstances of each case openly (*glasno*). Osinskii realized that many enthusiastic local officials would find this advice rather feeble, but he felt that they needed to learn new ways.[38]

Osinskii seemed to think that the term "coercion" had only positive connotations, and this led to some uneasiness even on the part of people who basically favored the sowing-committee program. One food-supply official praised Osinskii's emphasis on the possibilities of state intervention, but objected that "coercion" was a one-sided label that related only to external characteristics. Another writer felt that not enough emphasis was given in Bolshevik propaganda to demonstrating that coercion was applied only in order to allow the state to repay its debt to the peasantry and that the peasants' "consumer interest" remained paramount.[39]

The package on incentives contained in the sowing-committee legislation was criticized both in the government press and at the Eighth Congress. The most sustained critique was a series of articles by N. S. Bogdanov, an official in the Commissariat of Agriculture. Since Bogdanov attacked the legislation from a variety of angles, we shall be meeting him in later sections. We are here interested in his charge that Osinskii had overlooked available means of material incentive. According to Bogdanov, Osinskii had been brought to admit during the course of polemics that an improvement in "the personal living standard of the producers" was a necessary stimulus in the long run. But Osinskii seemed to believe that this stimulus was not currently available. In response, Bogdanov advocated that the *razverstka* be replaced by a tax, "in accordance with the unanimous desire of the village." Under a tax, the peasant would give the state a set amount; deliveries above this amount would be stimulated by individual bonuses (*premirovanie*). The tax was not a substitute for coer-

cion, for it would be collected "with whips and scorpions"; it was simply a more expedient form of coercion. Bogdanov also felt that the tax was compatible with the grain monopoly, "the contemporary form [of the] market."[40]

Osinskii argued (correctly) that the tax method was incompatible with the grain monopoly in the conditions of 1920, but also (incorrectly) that without the grain monopoly and the prohibition of the free market, there would be no successful state grain collection at all. But Osinskii saw the force in the considerations advanced by Bogdanov and tried to get as many tax-like advantages for the *razverstka* as possible. The sowing committees would help improve the statistical base and thus ensure a more equitable distribution of the *razverstka* burden. Osinskii also stressed the importance of collecting the *razverstka* as quickly as possible, so that at least after a certain date the state would let the peasant "live in peace."[41] Finally, Osinskii defended individual incentives in the form of higher "consumer norms." Osinskii gave the following hypothetical example: one village sows 29 poods and another village only 22 poods. From the first village 15 poods are taken, leaving 14, while 10 poods are taken from the second, leaving only 12. Thus in the case of the first village, "it turns out that the state receives more, and more is left with the industrious owner."[42] This reasoning makes more plausible Osinskii's later claim that the sowing-committee legislation was the first step toward a limitation of state demands that was soon afterwards put in the "clear and convenient form" of the food-supply tax.[43]

Bogdanov also argued that the few industrial items at the disposal of the government be used not just as a means of pressure for collective fulfillment of the *razverstka*, but as a positive stimulus for fulfillment of the sowing guidelines.[44] This idea was incorporated into the final legislation — evidently on the initiative of the Commissariat of Food Supply and over the objections of the Commissariat of Agriculture.[45] But the provision of industrial items to "individual homeowners" (*domokhozaeva*, an unusual term) touched off a revolt among Bolshevik delegates to the Eighth Con-

gress. An SR representative at the congress said he supported the wager on the industrious owner, but wondered how the policy differed from "a rebirth of that very kulak against which a struggle was fought with such energy."[46] Many Bolsheviks wondered the same thing, and giving means of production to economically strong individual peasants was too much for them to take. The Bolshevik caucus at the Eighth Congress voted to remove the provision about individual bonuses; the provision was saved only after Lenin himself appeared to defend it and to offer additional language intended to ensure that "kulaks" would not be able to benefit.

Lenin's remarks on this occasion show the confusion created by the contradiction between the sowing-committee legislation and the class-struggle outlook to which the Bolsheviks were officially committed. Lenin refused to answer a point-blank question on the difference between an industrious middle peasant and an industrious kulak; in response to this and all other difficult questions he responded simply by saying the locals should decide.[47] He insisted that the language of the new legislation ensured that the slightest use of "kulak methods" would not be rewarded; he then spoiled the effect by asserting that practically every middle peasant resorted to kulak methods.[48]

Despite the confusion, the thrust of Lenin's remarks was clear. While he showed genuine concern about the use of "kulak methods" and the growth of kulak influence, these took a decided back seat to the problem of raising productivity. In a backward and devastated economy, economic improvement required sustained effort: not to reward it was evident slavery (*perebarshchivanie*). Let people have as much land as they want, so long as they use it efficiently. Lenin reminded his audience that individual bonuses were being applied in industry – why not in agriculture?[49] Lenin summed up by stating flatly that the Central Committee had unanimously agreed that "we got carried away with the struggle against the kulak and lost all sense of measure."[50]

An examination of the debates surrounding the sowing-committee legislation thus reveals that the emphasis on coercion was not a rejection

of material incentives – indeed, it was coercion for the sake of material incentives. During the course of the debate, ways to strengthen material incentives that could be used within the framework of the state grain monopoly were taken up and incorporated into the legislation. The movement away from the class-struggle outlook went so far that it provoked a reaction on the part of rank-and-file Bolsheviks. They began to suspect what became painfully evident later on: the leadership had become more interested in the practical solution of national problems than in revolutionary purity.

Goals And Methods

Having considered at length the general outlook behind the legislation, we may now turn to its goals and the methods envisioned to accomplish them. These goals can be divided into two categories: quantitative – the greatest sown acreage possible; and qualitative – an improvement in the methods used by the peasants.

The legislation made the greatest possible extension of the sown acreage a state obligation. The program's thrust was not to whip reluctant peasants into sowing, but rather to use state mechanisms to enable the peasants to sow all available land by redistributing peasant resources. Various methods were to be employed: organizing "mutual aid" to sow the land of "weak" (*malomoshchnyi*) or Red Army households, or even compulsory leasing of land left unsown by its owner.[51] But the basic method was to be the preservation, collection and redistribution of seed grain.

From one point of view, the seed program was the least controversial part of the legislation. Some of the methods had already been used to mitigate droughts earlier in the year; it was Osinskii's experience with them in Tula that led to his original enthusiasm. Osinskii asserted that coercion would probably not have to be used very much to carry out this

part of the legislation; indeed, the seed program would reassure the peasants that the burden of the *razverstka* would not condemn them to inadequate sowing.[52]

From another point of view, seed redistribution was a very delicate operation, since seed was the peasants' "holy of holies" and they were extremely touchy about any interference with it.[53] Osinskii and his supporters therefore stressed that methods had to be adapted to local circumstances. The least radical method was simply to put each peasant's seed grain on registration (*uchet*); this was an attempt to ensure that the seed grain was not eaten up and remained available for local redistribution. The next possibility was to preserve the seed grain in public warehouses — in sacks carefully labelled with the owner's name.[54] Finally, in regions with wide variation in local harvests, a seed *razverstka* might be applied for redistribution within *volosts* or *uezds*.[55]

In discussing the political preparation needed to carry out seed redistribution, Kuraev advised officials to make clear that it had nothing to do with any move toward *kommuniia* (this was the point of labelling individual sacks). Seed redistribution should not be seen as a revival of the Committees of the Poor, since seed grain was taken from the poor as well as the middle peasant. Based on the experience of food-supply work, Kuraev also stressed the importance of working through the peasant village community (*obshchestvo*), since even the lowest level soviets were seen by the peasants as a "higher organ."[56]

If increasing sown acreage was the least controversial part of the program, using state coercion to improve agricultural methods was the most controversial. Osinskii included this idea in his proposals because of his perception that the agricultural crisis of 1920 had led to a qualitative as well as a quantitative decline: peasant sloppiness, while understandable, was leading to increased vulnerability from drought. He therefore argued that "obligatory rules" of good farming practice should be part of the sowing-committee campaign. As could be expected, the obligatory rules were supposed to be inspired by the example of the local industrious

owners.[57] In working out the details, Osinskii stressed again and again the danger of over-ambitiousness. The final legislative language gave much more attention to avoiding this danger – the rules had to be strictly coordinated with local conditions, they must not cause a "radical break" in local farming practice, they must not subject the peasant owner to increased risk – than to the actual content of the methods.[58]

What concrete methods did Osinskii and his supporters have in mind? In all of the available material, the exclusive focus is on only two: early plowing of fallow land and plowing *na ziab*, that is, plowing in autumn for spring sowing. According to Teodorovich, plowing fallow land in April instead of June would double the harvest, and plowing *na ziab* would lead to a thirty-five per cent increase.[59] The Bolshevik policy-makers were tempted by the possibility of a large harvest increase simply by mandating a couple of common-sense, easily implemented rules.

Osinskii later pointed to Tula province as an example of how these rules might be enforced. The Tula officials decided that if one-third of the peasants in a particular district wanted to carry out early plowing, the rest would be compelled to do so. Osinskii felt that this showed how the state could strengthen the influence of the "progressive industrious owner." He only warned against coercing the consent of the one-third minority or of relying too heavily on peasants without equipment who had no stake in the matter.[60] The interaction between officials and peasants described by Osinskii must have brought up memories of the Stolypin program.

This part of the legislation provoked an outcry from several quarters, based on the feeling that methods applicable to grain collection were being transferred inappropriately to grain production. In the words of a nonparty peasant delegate to the Eighth Congress: "I'll saw firewood under the stick. But you can't carry out agriculture under the stick."[61] Bogdanov granted that coercion might help increase sown acreage (given proper technical back-up) but denied that it could not do much to improve production methods. Production problems were so individualized and varied so much by locality that any coercive apparatus would be impossibly

bulky.[62] More fundamentally, coercion only made sense if the reasons for neglecting the rules were backwardness and stubbornness, rather than economic constraints. But in reality the peasant failed to turn up fallow land early enough not because of ill-will but because of the pressure of other tasks and the absence of livestock.[63] This point was one of the most common criticisms of the legislation. Even a conditional supporter such as Iurii Larin called on the Bolsheviks to outgrow the habit of calling the peasant a fool and a poor farmer — the bottleneck was not stupidity, but possibility.[64]

In response Osinskii protested that there must be some rules to which these objections did not apply, for example, "sow as early as possible without regard for holidays."[65] Osinskii was impatient with agronomists of the old school who insisted on long preparatory propaganda and the most careful implementation by strictly voluntary means. The crisis in agriculture was too pressing to wait until an extensive agronomical network was set up.[66] But all in all, the Bolshevik leaders would have been well-advised to drop the attempt to improve agricultural methods through coercive regulation. It was the least important part of the actual program, while at the same time it incurred a heavy political cost. This part of the sowing-committee program is also mainly responsible for the program's low reputation among historians.

Osinskii insisted on including the regulation of methods because he had a vision of the sowing-committee program as the first step on a new road to socialism: the title of his September article in *Pravda* was "The agricultural crisis and socialist construction in the village."[67] The clash between him and Bogdanov was as much about this long-term perspective as about the practical specifics of the program. Since Osinskii defended coercive centralized regulation while Bogdanov defended economic stimuli and since Osinskii spoke of sabotage and attacked *kulturnichestvo*, while Bogdanov spoke of "growing-in" (*vrastanie*), it would seem that this is a clash between proto-Stalinist and proto-Bukharinist. But things, as is so often the case, are not quite what they seem.

For Bogdanov, state farms and collective farms should be the focus of the state's effort to bring socialism to the village. Granted, the state farms at present were somewhat parasitic, but after they received tractors and electricity, they could become potent sources of state influence. After a process of "statization," there would be a "growing-in of these socialist forms into the petty-bourgeois body of the village."

The state's main tool in bringing this about would be "the monopolized market," supplemented by the cultural influence of the agronomists. The ultimate goal was a "production plan" encompassing agriculture. When this was achieved, Osinskii's urgent orders (*boevye prikazy*) might be useful. But until then, the state should be careful not to smother the independent initiative of the state and collective farms with coercive regulation.[68]

Osinskii rejected this strategy. For one thing, since the transition to collective farms would (as everyone knew) be a slow, patient process of persuasion, it could not be an answer to current problems. But Osinskii also sympathized with the peasant's suspicions about the whole strategy: "It is not only the interest of the property owner at work here, but an instinct that is completely healthy from a socialist point of view. . . . Russia will not arrive at socialism through a gradual consolidation of a network of 'grain factories.'"[69]

It followed that any strategy of socialization had to accept the long-term existence of individual peasant farms. Osinskii was opposed to private (*chastno-khoziaistvennyi*) agriculture, which he contrasted to state regulation; he was not opposed to single-owner (*edinolichnyi*) agriculture, which he contrasted to collective and state farms. Private agriculture had been exposed as bankrupt, but not single-owner agriculture. Probably the most striking manifestation of Osinskii's faith in the viability of peasant farms was his interest in the possibility of electric plows that could be used on individual strips.[70] As opposed to implanting socialist cells from below, Osinskii's approach would "take in the whole economy and gradually bring it by separate layers [*plasti*] up to a state setting."[71]

Osinskii never made this process extremely clear, but I assume the general idea is similar to Aleksandr Chaianov's idea of vertical concentration, whereby scattered peasant enterprises are brought up to the level of a state plan by means of "a gradual, successive chipping-off (*otshcheplenie*) of separate branches of individual enterprises and their organization into higher forms of large-scale social undertakings."[72]

Osinskii allowed that the two approaches were not mutually exclusive. Let the agronomist continue to use the collective farms as a base for *kulturnichestvo* — but this should not get in the way of a crash campaign to help the peasant by removing basic agricultural illiteracy. Indeed, the literacy campaign of Narkompros (Commissariat of Enlightenment) was a good model for combining short- and long-term perspectives in agricultural development. Osinskii's outlook allowed him to reject the dire warnings of Kautsky and the Mensheviks about a petty-bourgeois threat to the revolution; he felt confident that it would not take long before the peasants became an "unshakable support" of the soviet authority, socialism, and the communist party.[73]

If "Stalinist" implies support for a crash campaign of coercive collectivization based on the class-struggle outlook, then there were no Stalinists in 1920, for there was no one who so much as dreamed of such an option. On the other hand, both Osinskii and Bogdanov looked forward to a gradual approach to a planned, state-controlled agriculture dominated by a "monopolized market." If we are to assign honors for being forerunners of NEP, then Bogdanov deserves the credit he has received for his stout defense of the food-supply tax.[74] But Osinskii also deserves the credit that he has not received for his advocacy of a path to socialism based on acceptance of the viability of the single-owner peasant.

In the actual legislative process, complete confusion reigned about long- and short-term perspectives. Speakers at the Eighth Congress defended all possibilities: the legislation was only good for the short term, only good for the long term, good for neither, good for both.[75] Some praised what they saw as the legislation's long-term intent to replace

single-owner agriculture with "productive units" encompassing a whole village; others, who were paying closer attention, criticized the bill for basing future development on reactionary, splintered productive forms.[76]

The actual spirit of the legislation was best expressed by Kuraev at the Eighth Congress: while the legislation combined short- and long-term perspectives, all attention should be focused on the short-term effort to maximize sown acreage through the seed program. "We must crawl out of the quagmire of the agricultural crisis," for only this achievement would create a solid foundation for future socialization.[77] The preamble to the legislation reflected these priorities. (See Appendix.) Not a word was mentioned about socialism: the entire focus was on the current crisis and the effort to stave off disaster in the coming year. The sowing-committee legislation was no attempt at a great leap forward in the style of Stalin or Mao. Its aim was instead a small leap forward – out of the downward economic spiral of a time of troubles to the normal economic relations needed for future progress, no matter how defined.

Organizational Forms

Osinskii was very proud of the organizational innovations contained in the legislation: the sowing committees proper (*posevkomy*) and the village committees (*selkomy*). The sowing committees were designed to be a small, flexible and authoritative bureaucratic task force that would focus the energies of local officialdom on the top priority task of the sowing campaign. The village committees were designed to enlist the peasants themselves in the campaign.[78]

The logic behind the sowing committees proper was identical to what Osinskii called "democratic centralism." The democratic centralists were an opposition grouping within the Bolshevik party that tried to use Leninist orthodoxy to legitimize their own concerns.[79] These concerns

actually had little to do with either democracy or centralism. Osinskii went out of his way to argue that the collegiality he defended was compatible with the dictatorial power of a single individual – Lenin, for example. He and his colleagues dissociated themselves from attempts to make collegiality a device for enlisting the broad worker masses. Their focus of attention was not on the center, but rather on the middle rungs of the state apparatus in the provinces. "Democratic centralism" was the protest of local officials against the disruptive visits of central representatives, and its aim was to bring down the "Chinese wall" that isolated local officials from central representatives and from each other.[80] Osinskii said that it meant that "the directives of the center are not given out from the top, straight down, through departmental pillars, but that there exist horizontal bridges (*peremychki*), or hoops, that are called executive committees. These create connections between the scattered departments."[81]

The demands of the democratic centralists were motivated less by any ideological principle such as democracy or socialism than by the desire for efficiency in the specific context of a newly-emerging state apparatus. The new officials should learn from each other rather than sinking into their own narrow bureaucratic specialties or, worse yet, fighting among themselves to the point of mutual arrest. No one individual – whether he was a bourgeois specialist or a "red governor" – could make coherent decisions without extensive consultations, so that the simplicity that one-man-rule seemed to promise was illusory. Besides human limitations, the necessity for consultation arose from the instability of the environment of the fledgling state apparatus, caused both by the economic breakdown and the unsettled nature of social relations.[82]

Because of the economic emergency, the democratic centralists recognized the necessity of militarization. But here they made a distinction which I can best render as civilian militarization versus uniformed militarization. (The point can be made less clumsily in Russian by contrasting *militarizatsiia* with *voenizatsiia*.) Uniformed militarization implied

deprivation of civil rights, blind reliance on military methods, and a power grab by the army bureaucracy. Civilian militarization implied all-out mobilization campaigns within the state apparatus to meet pressing emergencies. In concrete terms, it required "abbreviated collegia" – abbreviated both in terms of membership (three to five persons) and authority (a specific priority task). As an example, Osinskii described the "provincial food-supply conferences" with which he had worked in Viatka province. This description reveals Osinskii's hopes for the sowing committees.[83]

> We met every day or every other day, for two hours, in our three-member, stripped-down (*boevoi*) collegium, allowing only the shortest debates. Our resolutions were recorded to check up on their implementation. Each person was given a specific task and a specific deadline. At the beginning of the session the secretary announced the deadlines that had passed, and each person had to report fulfillment or to explain why he had failed. We carefully established links with the localities, kept a record of their work and checked up on it. We demanded regular visits with reports from representatives from the localities. We ourselves were always on a direct line with the *uezd*s. Finally, we instituted disciplinary fines for carelessness and lack of fulfillment.[84]

The sowing committees were to bear the same relation to the local land sections (*zemskii otdely*) of the Commissariat of Agriculture as the food-supply conferences had to the regular food-supply organs. The sowing committees would have not more than five members: the chairmen of the local food-supply committee, land section, and soviet executive committee, plus a representative of a higher-level soviet executive committee as well as a representative from the village committees. It would have no technical apparatus of its own, relying instead on the already existing staff of the local land sections and food-supply committees.

In an early draft of the legislation, Osinskii listed all the bureaucratic ills the sowing committees were supposed to cure: the committees would inspire local officials and counteract their lackadaisical attitude; they

would cut through red tape, overcome interdepartmental squabbles, and put down bureaucratic sabotage.[85] This frank recital of defects was dropped from the final draft, and in general the bureaucratic rationale behind the sowing committees was played down in the propaganda supporting the legislation. But it was crucial for Osinskii, who gave the innovation of the food-supply conferences most of the credit for the relative success of food-supply work. This was the kind of task force needed to carry out a focused campaign with a political sensitivity missing from the normal workings of the local bureaucracy.[86]

Osinskii was known as a critic of the over-centralization symbolized by the industrial *glavki* and he resented the accusation that the sowing committees were just another *glavk*. On the contrary, he retorted, the *modus operandi* of a *glavk* was to send out a departmental representative with a "three-foot mandate" who promptly disrupted local work. But in the case of the sowing committees, the visitor from the center did not represent any one department but rather the Central Soviet Executive Committee (VTSIK), and the visitor's mission was to strengthen the authority of local organs and unify their efforts, not to replace them.[87]

Osinskii assured agricultural officials that the sowing committees were only temporary and not meant as a permanent replacement of the land sections.[88] As this indicates, the sowing-committee legislation was caught up in bureaucratic politics: most of the initiative for the legislation came from the Commissariat of Food Supply and most of the skepticism came from the Commissariat of Agriculture.[89] In the countryside, the two departments had settled down into a bad cop/good cop relationship: the Commissariat of Food Supply represented the state that put heavy pressure on the peasants while the Commissariat of Agriculture represented the state that helped and defended the peasant. Iurii Larin called for a combination of the two departments — a *narzemprod* — that would avoid one-sided grain procurement without relation to agricultural needs and one-sided agronomy without relation to pressing state needs.[90] One aim of the sowing-committee legislation was in fact to unite the perspectives of

procurement and production. In the meantime, impatient food-supply officials felt that they represented the "state outlook," for only they grasped the urgency of improving next year's harvest and not simply preaching better methods and collective production.[91] In response, agricultural officials felt that the land sections, neglected by the center in the past, were now being unjustly blamed for the agricultural crisis.[92]

Separate from the enlistment of officials into the sowing committees was the attempt to enlist the peasantry into the campaign by means of the village committees. As with the sowing committees proper, the idea of enlisting "the will of the *mir*" in fulfilling state obligations was taken from the experience of food-supply work.[93] Larin pointed out that the sowing campaign could not be carried out only by applying pressure from outside, since the state did not have adequate resources for either material incentives or coercion. The only hope lay in activating the independent initiative (*samodeiatelnost*) and the moral pressure of the village itself. Larin assured nervous Bolsheviks that the peasant committees would not become "a base for counterrevolution," since their sole purpose was to carry out a state assignment.[94] Accordingly, the village committees were elected directly by the village community but headed by the chairman of the village soviet; they were given responsibility for all the major tasks of the campaign at the village level.[95]

The contradictory nature of the village committees – elected peasant representative and state organ – created some difficulty in giving them a name. The original name was "committees of assistance in the improvement of agriculture," but Kuraev objected that the committees were not assisting the authorities but exercising authority themselves. Kuraev's suggestion was adopted and the word "assistance" was dropped.[96] Whatever the name, the Bolsheviks were at pains to distinguish them from the Committees of the Poor. This was underlined in Osinskii's first draft, where the committees were to be recruited "from the very best [peasant] owners."[97] Osinskii later admitted that the peasants were suspicious of

these committees unless they could be convinced they had nothing to do with the *razverstka*, the Committees of the Poor, or *kommuniia*.[98]

Critics of the legislation did not oppose the goal of enlistment and independent initiative, but they did attack the method proposed in the legislation. S. P. Sereda, the Commissar of Agriculture, suggested that the cooperatives offered a better framework for enlistment into the task of state regulation. This suggestion was overruled as "politically incorrect."[99] The political danger was underscored by the stand of the other socialist parties represented at the Eighth Congress. Calling the Bolshevik promise of participation an "empty sound" to peasants deprived of their rights, they all insisted on freely elected cooperatives, where they presumably expected to do well.[100] Evidently the cooperatives could not be assigned the role now given to the village committees until this political danger was removed.

Many of the critics' suspicions about the sowing committees turned out to be justified. In spring 1921, Osinskii berated local officials who failed even to get a committee elected or who felt appointees were an adequate substitute. Even worse, officials tried to enlist the committees in the technical work of seed collection and the dirty work of applying coercion. The failure to give the peasants an independent voice was even more inexcusable after the introduction of the food-supply tax and the legalization of free trade, since this gave officials a "common language" with the peasants. By the end of the spring sowing campaign, Osinskii felt that successful village committees had been instituted in many places, and advocated that they be given new tasks – including, perhaps ironically, setting up new cooperatives in the villages.[101]

The opposition parties could easily point out the Bolshevik failure to combine genuine independent initiative with the heavy burdens the state had to impose, but the underlying dilemma was insoluble. Much of Lenin's attention at this time was occupied with trying to find ways around the problem. Lenin was a strong defender of the sowing-committee legislation and of the idea of using coercion to help the peasantry. His

remarks stress the importance of practical achievement rather than the application of "Marxist methods." Lenin praised Osinskii for displaying this attitude and followed him in warning about the dangers of trying to do too much.[102] But he was not greatly interested in the details of the economic regulation of agriculture and tended to view the sowing-committee legislation in the wider context of his search for mechanisms to handle the political challenge posed by the peasantry.

Lenin's immediate problem is illustrated by the remarks of nonparty delegates to the Eighth Congress, transcribed by Lenin himself and sent around to other Central Committee members. These remarks can only be properly interpreted with a correct understanding of the point at contention, namely, should the *kulak/bedniak* division be replaced by industrious/lazy lout? The peasant speakers divided about equally on this question.[103] A closer look shows that those who supported the industrious owner were not adverse to coercion but were greatly upset by the burden of the *razverstka* and tended to support a food-supply tax, while those who insisted on the existence of kulaks also fiercely insisted on *razverstka* fulfillment. This second group of speakers also viewed the label of the lazy lout as a code word for the poor peasant, arguing that it was the devastation of the civil war that led to the difficulties of the poor.

What conclusion did Lenin draw from all of this? It was probably that (as he himself remarked a few days later) the Bolsheviks had gotten carried away with the struggle against the kulak, since it was the fixation on the kulak that was the main obstacle to whole-hearted support of the sowing-committee legislation. He might also have concluded that if the Bolsheviks were really going to throw in their lot with the industrious owner, then something had to be done about the *razverstka*.[104]

In the longer term, the problem of the peasantry was part of the larger problem of the "non-party masses." In time of war, these masses, whether worker or peasant, could understand the necessity of sacrifices – but would they also be able to grasp the same necessity in the more abstract case of economic reconstruction? One solution was to emphasize the

threat of war, and so Lenin prophesied war and asserted in the accents later amplified by Stalin that "we are backward in relation to the capitalist powers and will remain so; we will be beaten if we do not achieve the restoration of our economy."[105] Another solution was to find mechanisms for the enlistment of the non-party masses. Lenin defined his problem in terms that apply without change to Gorbachev: given the fact that the masses have long lived in circumstances that crushed their independent initiative so that they have trouble feeling like masters *(khoziaeva)*, how can we organize them "not for opposition to authority, but for its support, [in order to develop] the measures of their workers' authority and carry them out completely?" The trade unions were one candidate for this job, and the village committees were another. When the village committees did not pan out, Lenin turned to the cooperatives in his final effort to square this particular circle.[106]

In the very long term, Lenin believed that the only permanent solution to the problem of state consciousness – recognition of the necessity of sacrifices for the common good – was the achievement of socialist consciousness. As noted earlier, the Bolsheviks did not have the conceptual vocabulary for discussing the dilemma of public goods, and so, while they had a practical grasp of it, they explained it by pointing to "petty-bourgeois psychology." They tended therefore to assume that once peasants were given proper technical equipment and were no longer isolated individualists, they would understand the necessity for sacrifices. But while Osinskii was upbeat about the possibility of achieving state consciousness in the interim, Lenin was rather pessimistic during this period. A leitmotif in his speeches was the Sukharevka (the open-air market in Moscow that became a symbol of illegal speculation) residing in the soul of every independent peasant. In a moment of deep despair in early 1921, Lenin stated that it would take years of re-education to undo the heritage of capitalism – until then, many peasants would not understand that the worker-peasant government took grain only to improve the position of the

workers *and* the peasants. And this meant that every spring there would be disorders and uprisings.[107]

Reflections

The principal defect of most earlier accounts of the sowing committees is that they do not place the debate in its full context nor examine the actual content of the legislation. After a closer look at the record, the following conclusions seem appropriate:

1. The sowing-committee legislation had no connection with any utopian "leap into communism"; it was a small leap forward, or better, an attempt to crawl out of a quagmire. The Bolshevik perspective of 1920 is accurately summed up by an appeal issued by the Eighth Congress: "Let us double our efforts and a reward will not be lacking to the toilers. A year will go by [and] we will no longer freeze in unlit homes. . . . Five years will go by, and we will finally cure the wounds caused by the war to our economy."[108]

This perspective applies not only to the content of the program — seed redistribution, anti-drought methods — but also the organizational forms: the sowing committees were meant as a device for focusing the energies of officialdom on a top-priority campaign. Osinskii and his supporters did stress the importance of keeping long-term perspectives in mind, but for the time being they warned primarily against over-ambitiousness.

2. By 1920, Bolshevik policy-makers had moved rather far along the spectrum from the class-struggle outlook to the partnership outlook — far enough, in fact, to create difficulties with local activists. The substitution of industrious/lazy for rich/poor as the basic peasant division, the emphasis on objective economic difficulties, the rejection of collective productive forms as the main path to socialism, the call for sacrifices for the common

good rather than for the revolution – all of these were intrinsic to the sowing-committee legislation.

The shift was not made with complete clarity. The continued use of the word "sabotage" was ominous, even when it did not refer to class enemies but rather to demoralized peasants and negligent officials. Prescriptions for achieving state consciousness still relied mainly on socialist strategies for remaking "petty-bourgeois psychology."[109] Perhaps most dangerously, the kulak/bedniak class-struggle framework was not repudiated but only pushed into the background by the exclusive focus on the middle peasant. Lenin dealt with the problem simply by dropping the word "kulak" from his vocabulary.[110] But although the class-struggle outlook went into abeyance, it did not die, and remained ready any time the Bolsheviks were again frustrated with the peasantry.

3. The rhetorical emphasis on coercion did not reflect an obsession born of civil-war militarism and/or communist fanaticism. The need for coercion arose from the grim realities of a situation where material incentives were low and where heavy burdens had to be imposed before the state could repay its debt to the peasantry. It was also a symbol of the moral right of the worker-peasant authority to impose obligations as well as of the contribution the state could make through its "organizing strength." We perhaps ought rather to compliment Osinskii for his eschewal of euphemism than to be shocked by the mention of a reality inherent in the situation.

At the ground level, where the state and peasantry met face to face, the distinction made by Lenin and others between illegitimate violence and legitimate coercion may have seemed remote. But despite the grubby realities of the application of power, I would argue that this distinction is a valid one in moral terms. There may even have been a perceptible political difference between force applied for revolutionary goals alien to the peasantry and force applied for understandable state interests. In any event, I would argue strongly that historians need to confront this distinction more explicitly in their description of the civil-war period.

The coercion of the sowing-committee legislation was designed as part of a broad aid package that included individualized material incentives. The use of coercion in the seed program was not controversial nor does it seem problematical today.[111] The use of coercion to improve agricultural methods is less defensible, since it seems to have been based on an underestimation of the economic difficulties that prevented use of the methods. But in Osinskii's defense it should be mentioned that he continually stressed caution and gradualness and that the methods actually proposed were standard anti-drought measures. As it turned out, only the seed program was of any importance and the crash campaign to improve agricultural methods did not prove viable.

4. In the bureaucratic battle between the Commissariat of Food Supply and the Commissariat of Agriculture, historians have tended almost automatically to side with the Commissariat of Agriculture – even when, or especially when, they are unaware of the existence of the departmental clash. In general, it is always easier for historians to adopt the role of oppositionist and criticize the powers that were for imposing heavy burdens. Although as a good American I too am suspicious of both coercion and the state, I am willing to go so far as to argue that in fall 1920 the Commissariat of Food Supply did represent "the state outlook" – that is, the common interest in combining a heavy procurement burden with a crash campaign to improve the upcoming harvest. There were obvious flaws in Osinskii's program – many of them admitted and corrected at the time – but our criticism should be tempered with humility and even respect for people struggling to avert an overwhelming crisis with desperately few resources.

Although the sowing-committee legislation was only a passing episode, the account presented here has wider implications for our understanding of this crucial period as a whole. The sowing committees were not an apotheosis of War Communism; indeed, the traditional stereotypes of War Communism get in the way of recognizing the realities of the period.[112] It would take us too far afield to discuss all the different arguments sub-

sumed under the label of War Communism, so I shall discuss only the most plausible of these arguments, namely, that legislation such as the sowing committees reflected a state orientation that was unique to the civil war.

Writers both in the West and the Soviet Union point to a "statization" of the Bolshevik outlook that was one of the sources of Stalinism. The sowing committees are cited as a vivid example of this process.[113] The Bolsheviks certainly had great faith in the state, but this can hardly be ascribed to the civil war. The world war and the civil war did lead to a new emphasis on state regulation of society, but this antedated the Bolsheviks and encompassed almost the entire political spectrum. In 1917, a food-supply official quoted the arch-liberal Peter Struve as calling for "the coercive regulation of basic economic processes."[114] A look at the land committees of 1917 will also help put the sowing-committee program into perspective. Already deeply worried about sown acreage, officials of the Provisional Government declared sowing a state duty and gave local land committees wide powers to deal with the problem, including the right to take over unsown land.[115]

The Bolsheviks themselves did not undergo a process of statization, since they were strongly pro-state from the beginning.[116] Their enthusiasm for the state derived both from their Marxist principles and the general Russian political environment. Lenin's talk about the "withering away of the state" is no proof to the contrary. For purposes of this slogan, Lenin carefully and rather arbitrarily defined the state as a repressive apparatus alien to society. If the revolution succeeded in its aim of overcoming the gulf between state and society and uniting "dual Russia," then of course the state in this restricted sense would wither away. But before, during and after 1917, Lenin was always pro-state when he was not using this specialized definition – that is, most of the time.

The Bolshevik's state orientation remained in force during NEP. Both Osinskii and Bogdanov had wanted agriculture brought into the state sphere by means of "the monopolized market," and this remained the

ideal during NEP, when the "crowding-out" of the private market was a matter of pride. Of course, this state orientation, which assumed rational economic methods in partnership with the peasantry, had only a passing resemblance to Stalin's state-building.

The real change in the Bolshevik outlook during the revolution and civil war did not occur in the area of state orientation but rather in the area of the class-struggle versus partnership outlooks. A common view of this question is that the Bolsheviks went through a moderate phase in spring 1918 but then were radicalized by the civil war, with a sharp break in attitude occurring only in spring 1921. This interpretation is strengthened by Lenin's own reference in 1921 to his writings of 1918 as a forerunner of NEP. The first time Lenin returned to spring 1918 as a model, however, was at the Eighth Congress of Soviets in December 1920. David Dallin was skeptical: had not the Bolsheviks relied on force in spring 1918 as well?[117]

Dallin's skepticism was justified: spring 1918 was not the moderate forerunner of NEP that Lenin claimed it to be. The class-struggle view reigned supreme in 1917 and the first half of 1918, when it found its sharpest practical expression in the Committees of the Poor (*Kombedy*). It was the failure of the Committees of the Poor to solve the food-supply problem that led to some hard rethinking in the latter part of 1918 and finally to the policy of cooperation with the middle peasant that became official party policy in 1919. The change in perspective was only imperfectly assimilated, especially at the local level, and it is easy to point to evidence of class-struggle attitudes in 1920 and 1921. But contrary to the stereotype of War Communism, the class-struggle attitude represented the heritage of the past, while the partnership outlook was growing in strength.

Taking a step back, we might ask which interpretation is *a priori* more plausible: that a group of extremist revolutionaries took power in a year of tumult, preached moderation and then grew radical or that they came in breathing fire and learned moderation as they shed their inexperience and

took on responsibility for complex national problems? I would say the latter. It was the experience of common catastrophe that pushed the Bolsheviks into asking people to make sacrifices like brothers (*po-bratski*) rather than in the spirit of class war.[118]

According to this interpretation, the sowing-committee legislation was not the high point of an evolution leading in a direction away from NEP, nor even (as some Soviet historians maintain) a harbinger of NEP's change of direction.[119] Rather it was one more step in an evolution that began in 1918 and continued into NEP. So far as I know, only one other historian shares this interpretation of the sowing committees, but his testimony is valuable because he did not like what he saw. Lev Kritsman argued that contrary to a commonly held view, the economic collapse did not lead to centralization but rather to decentralization and petty-bourgeois degeneration. As an example of the process, he cited the switch from class struggle to the industrious owner.[120]

Neither Lenin nor Osinskii saw the sowing campaign as incompatible with NEP. In his speech to the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, Lenin asserted that the introduction of the food-supply tax did not contradict the sowing campaign, since it continued "the line of maximum support of the industrious owner." Lenin also referred to the industrious owner at the Ninth Congress of Soviets in December 1921, where he pronounced the sowing campaign a qualified success.[121] There was no suggestion that the introduction of NEP in itself ended the need for emergency measures.

Osinskii was associated with NEP from the very beginning, since he was a member of the first Politburo commission to draft the legislation on the food-supply tax. Osinskii's change of heart about the food-supply tax seems to have resulted from his experience trying to get the sowing campaign off the ground, since he wrote immediately after the Tenth Party Congress that the tax would help the campaign leave the "extremely strained and uncertain position" in which it found itself.[122] Osinskii could accept the tax more easily because no vain effort was being made to combine the tax with a continued prohibition of free trade. He had argued

earlier that "speculation" was one of the factors staving off the agricultural crisis, so he was not being inconsistent when he argued that free trade had picked up where the bonus system of the sowing-committee legislation had left off in activating the private interest of the peasant in expanded production.[123]

When Osinskii wrote a pamphlet a year after the Eighth Congress he did not regard the sowing committees as an embarrassment but rather as a praiseworthy legislative milestone. The *razverstka* had been necessary when the economic breakdown prevented the soviet authority from giving much of anything to the peasants, and so officials had gotten into the habit of listening only to their own reasons and shutting out the peasants' voice. The sowing-committee legislation had not only recognized the priority of improving agriculture but had been the first state initiative based from the beginning on the possibility of cooperating with the peasants.[124]

The "extraordinary measures" of 1928 and the subsequent forced collectivization did not mean a return to the "war communist" methods of the sowing committees — on the contrary, the industrious owners were the first to suffer from the "great breakthrough."[125] Stalin used violence not to help repay a debt but to exact tribute from the peasantry, not to increase the productivity of single-owner agriculture but to transform the peasant's mode of production. If Stalin's onslaught was a return to anything, it was to the class-struggle radicalism of 1917 and early 1918. The sowing-committee legislation did not represent War Communism or proto-Stalinism: it was instead an important milestone in the evolution of a possible Bolshevik alternative to Stalinism.

Appendix: Preamble to "On Measures for the Strengthening and Development of Peasant Agriculture"

The victorious but burdensome struggle of the workers and peasants with Russian and foreign landowners, kulaks and capitalists, demanded great sacrifices from the laboring peasants. They endured the ravages of the pillaging White Guards. They suffered from the mobilization of workers and horses for the Red Army, the defender of worker-peasant freedom.

They have received too few machines, scythes, iron, nails and the rest from the factories and workshops destroyed by Kolchak and Denikin and deprived by them of coal and raw materials. The import of goods from abroad necessary for the peasantry was stopped by the foreign landowners and capitalists. Despite all the efforts of the worker-peasant authority and its concern for the toiling peasantry, sown acreage in the last years has shrunk, the cultivation on the land has worsened, and livestock has fallen onto a decline.

Due to the efforts of the heroic Red Army the last dangerous internal enemy, General Wrangel, has been crushed. For a time the pressure of the external enemy has slackened. The soviet authority again turns its main attention to peaceful construction and in the first place to the strengthening and development of peasant agriculture.

While recognizing agriculture as the most important branch of the economy of the Republic and placing the responsibility of intensified and comprehensive help to peasant agriculture on all organs of the soviet authority, the worker-peasant authority declares at the same time that the correct performance of agriculture is a high state responsibility of the peasant population.

The worker-peasant authority demands that the state make every effort to help agriculture with livestock and equipment, repair stations and granaries, seed material, fertilizer, agronomic advice, and the like. At the same time, it demands of all agriculturalists the full sowing of the fields, according to the tasks set by the state, and the correct cultivation of the land, according to the example of the best and most industrious owners – middle peasants and poor peasants.

The harvest failure that overtook the country in 1920, as well as the drought that threatens in 1921 according to the indications of science and other signs, have created the necessity for special intensity and for specially harmonious work in the preparation and implementation of the agricultural campaign in 1921 according to a united plan and a united leadership.

Source: *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti*, vol. 12, 80-81.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Daniel Field and the referees for *The Carl Beck Papers* for their generous and helpful comments. For ease of reading, soft signs are not used in transliteration.

2. The official name of the legislation was "On Measures for the Strengthening and Development of Peasant Agriculture." The text of the legislation can be found in *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti*, vol. 12 (Moscow, 1986), 73-87.

3. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., 42:364 (28 February 1921). All citations by Lenin are from the Eighth Congress of Soviets unless otherwise specified.

4. The following is based on my book *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914-1921*, Berkeley, 1990, and my article "Bolshevik *Razverstka* and War Communism," *Slavic Review*, 45:4 (Winter 1986), 673-688.

5. L. Trotsky, *The Defence of Terrorism* (London, 1921), 103-4.

6. The articles were published as a book entitled *Gosudarstvennoe regulirovanie krestianskogo khoziaistva* (Moscow, 1920).

7. Lenin, PSS, 43:330, 340.

8. Bertrand Mark Patenaude, "Bolshevism in Retreat: The Transition to the NEP, 1920-1922," Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1987, 280-1. This is an informative survey of public discussion during this period from which my essay has benefited, even though we take different views of the significance of the sowing committees.

9. See the admiring discussion by two current reformers, Grigorii Khanin and Vasilii Seliunin, "Lukavaia Tsifra," *Novy mir*, No. 2, 1987, 190.

10. *Pravda*, 4 November 1920; Lenin, PSS, 42:186.

11. *Vosmoi vserossiiskii s"ezd rabochikh, krestianskikh, krasnoarmeiskikh i kazachikh deputatov* (Moscow, 1921), 123-7. (Hereafter cited as "Eighth Congress.")

12. Osinskii in *Pravda*, 5 September 1920. *"Malomoshchnyii"* later acquired a more precise statistical meaning and represented a category in between the poorest peasant and the middle peasant. During the sowing-committee debate, it was used with the rhetorical motivation of avoiding class-struggle overtones.

13. *Pravda*, 19 December 1920.

14. Lenin, PSS, 42:180-1; see also 188. The Menshevik resolution at the Eighth Congress also asked for an end to privileges for the communes. Eighth Congress, 199-200.

15. *Pravda*, 12 December 1920; see also Lenin, PSS, 42:181.

16. Cited in Ivan Iurkov, *Ekonomicheskaia politika partiia v derevne 1917-1920* (Moscow, 1980), 179.

17. Osinskii's analysis can be found in *Pravda*, 5 September 1920.

18. For the earlier view, see Iu. Larin, *Pravda*, 24 March 1920; for the later view, see Osinskii, *Pravda*, 5 September 1920; Lenin, PSS, 42:306-9 (February 1921).

19. *Pravda*, 5 September 1920.

20. Lenin, PSS, 42:150. For similar acknowledgements by Aleksandr Tsiurupa, see Lih, "Bolshevik *Razverstka*," 678-9.

21. *Pravda*, 5 November 1920.

22. *Kalendar-spravochnik prodovolstvennika* (Moscow, 1921), 120-2 (evidently a pre-NEP publication).

23. Lenin, PSS, 42:146-7; see also 5-6, 124, 139-40; Trotsky, *Defence of Terrorism*, 106-7; Lezhnev (speaker at the Eighth Congress), Eighth Congress, 141-2, Patenaude, "Bolshevism in Retreat," 73-75.

24. For a passage that completely amalgamates poor/rich and industrious/lazy rhetoric, see Lenin, PSS, 42:174.

25. *Pravda*, 12 Septmber 1920. In 1922, Osinskii described the legislation as a "druzhnyi obshchii vsenarodnyi pokhod (kampaniia) protiv razrukhi" ("amicable, united, all-national

crusade [campaign] against breakdown"). Osinskii, *Vosstanovlenie krestianskogo khoziaistva v Rossii i nashi zadachi* (Moscow, 1922), 13-4. See also Lenin, PSS, 138-9.

26. Eighth Congress, 197-9. See also Fyodor Dan's contrast between *nasilie* and *samodeiatelnost* (41-3) and remarks by the SR spokesman Volskii (48-51).

27. Lenin, PSS, 42:175, 180.

28. One introduction to this topic is Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

29. *Pravda*, 7 November 1920. Iurii Poliakov quotes Osinskii as rejecting the very idea of combining state regulation with economic stimuli. Poliakov, *Perekhod k NEPu i sovetskoe krestianstvo* (Moscow, 1967), 223. Osinskii's actual words were: "It has been said that we must unite regulation with stimulation, and by this is meant that we must apply a food-supply tax according to acreage and stimulate *in this way*. (Eighth Congress, 146-7. Emphasis added.) Osinskii's criticism was thus of a particular form of economic stimulation that he found inexpedient.

30. *Pravda*, 5 November 1920.

31. *Pravda*, 28 April 1920. The *subbotniki*, always a good indicator of urgent priorities, were used during the Peasant Week campaigns. William Chase, "Voluntarism, Mobilisation and Coercion: *Subbotniki* 1919-1921," *Soviet Studies*, 41:4 (January 1989), 122. This article also contains some useful reflections on the role of coercion during the Civil War.

32. Osinskii, *Pravda*, 5 November 1920.

33. *Biulletin Narodnogo Komissariata po Prodovolstviiu*, 30 November 1920 (hereafter cited as *Biulletin*); Lenin, PSS, 42:138-9, 146-7, 183. See also the remarks of Evgenii Varga in the introduction to the French edition of Osinskii's book, La *r)gularisation par l')tat de la culture paysanne* (Moscow, 1921), 5-10.

34. Lenin, PSS, 42:179, 139-40, 178. The main critic of the legislation, N. S. Bogdanov, had tried to use Lenin's 1919 statements on the communes as a weapon against the sowing-committee legislation in *Ekonomicheskaia zhizn*, 19 December 1920. (Hereafter *EZ*)

35. *Pravda*, 25 June 1920.

36. *Pravda*, 5 September 1920.

37. *EZ*, 26 November 1920. My notes do not reveal any use of the term "coercion" in Sviderskii's discussion.

38. *Pravda*, 5 April, 7 April and 10 April 1921. See also Osinskii's article in *Pravda*, 7 November 1920. It would be interesting to find out how many cases of this kind were ever brought to trial.

39. Book review by N.M. in *Biulletin*, 20 November 1920; L. Mitrofanov in *EZ*, 21 December 1920. See also N. Bogdanov, *EZ*, 2 December 1920.

40. *EZ*, 19 December and 16 October 1920. Similar proposals in favor of a food-supply tax (but not free trade) were made at the Eighth Congress by the Left SRs (120-2) and the Mensheviks (197-200).

41. *Pravda*, 4 November 1920. After the introduction of the food-supply tax, Osinskii argued that the sowing committees were needed to provide the statistical base of a fair tax distribution. *Pravda*, 25 March 1921.

42. Eighth Congress, 146-7. Osinskii admitted that the unfair distribution of the *razverstka* burden among individual peasants was a major reason behind support of the food-supply tax by food-supply officials. *Prodovolstvennaia politika v svete obshchego khoziaistvennoi stroitelstve sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1920), 189-92. See also Patenaude, "Bolshevism in Retreat," 68.

43. Osinskii, *Vosstanovlenie*, 13-4. Poliakov cites this passage and claims that Osinskii denied any real significance to the Tenth Party Congress. Poliakov misinterprets the passage because he equates the food-supply tax – which Osinskii refers to here – and the decriminalization of free trade. Osinskii did not deny the novelty of the latter decision. Poliakov, *Perekhod k NEPu*, 225-6, fn. 65.

44. *EZ*, 19 December 1920.

45. Lenin, PSS, 42:185.

46. Eighth Congress, 48-51.

47. Osinskii struggled with this problem of differentiation in *Pravda*, 5 November 1920.

48. Lenin, PSS, 42:185-95. Lenin also gave contradictory guidelines about the individual versus the collective use of equipment.

49. In another place, Lenin remarked that there was nothing socialist about the use of such bonuses in industry. Lenin, PSS, 42:151.

50. Lenin, PSS, 42:195.

51. *Na borbu s golodom* (Moscow, 1921), 74-5.

52. *Pravda*, 25 June 1920; *Biulletin*, 30 November 1920; *Kalendar*, 120-2. For the background to the sowing campaign, see Iurkov, *Ekonomicheskaia politika*, 56-68.

53. V. V. Kuraev, *Pravda*, 19 December 1920.

54. A peasant delegate to the Eighth Congress from Riazan warned of abuses concerning these warehouses. Lenin, PSS, 42:384.

55. According to Sviderskii, nine deficit provinces went the full route; five surplus provinces with harvest difficulties put seed grain on registration; for political reasons, Siberia and Ukraine rejected any seed redistribution. *EZ*, 22 December 1920. See also the editorial in *Pravda*, 24 September 1920.

56. *Pravda*, 19, 21 and 22 December 1920. Official instructions published in January 1921 also spoke of using the peasant *mir*. *Dekrety*, 151-8.

57. See Lenin, PSS, 42:179.

58. Osinskii proposed most of this language in his *Pravda* article of 5 November 1920; officials from the Agriculture Commissariat critized the draft legislation because of its vagueness on the actual methods (Biulletin, 30 November 1920).

59. Eighth Congress, 123-7.

60. *Pravda*, 10 April 1921. Documents from Tula can be found in *EZ*, 10 and 11 December 1920. Osinskii also felt that a trained agronomist should approve the sowing rules.

61. Lenin, PSS, 42:384.

62. *EZ*, 16 October and 19 December 1920. A similar criticism was made by Dallin (Eighth Congress, 197-9).

63. *EZ*, 2 December 1920.

64. *Pravda*, 12 December 1920. See also *Na borbu*, 92-5. Osinskii later criticized the Kaluga sowing committee for mandating methods without taking into account material constraints on the peasant. *Pravda*, 10 April 1921.

65. *Pravda*, 7 November 1920.

66. *Pravda*, 13 May and 17 May 1921.

67. *Pravda*, 5 September 1920. Historians who restrict themselves to this, the opening article of the series, will receive a misleading impression of the relative weight of short-and long-term priorities in Osinskii's outlook, since it is the only place he goes into any detail about his long-term hopes.

68. *EZ*, 16 and 17 July 1920; 16 October 1920. See also the comment by S.P. Sereda recorded by Arthur Ransome, *Russia in 1919*, (New York 1919), 151-2.

69. *Pravda*, 5 September 1920; see also the article by V. Filippov, *EZ*, 1 October 1920.

70. *Pravda*, 5 September and 5 November 1920.

71. Eighth Congress, 146-7. For further discussion, see *Pravda*, 5 September 1920.

72. Chaianov, *Osnovnye idei i formy organizatsiii selsko-khoziaistvennoi kooperatsiia*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1927), 24. Reprinted in *Oeuvres choisies de A. V. Cajanov*, ed. B. Kerblay, Paris, (1967), vol. 5. The first edition was published in 1919 and was therefore available to Osinskii.

73. *Pravda*, 5 September 1920.

74. Advocates of the food-supply tax in 1920 did not support free trade as well, and Bogdanov for one seemed sincere in his defense of the state monopoly. In 1921, he criticized the first trial balloons in support of the food-supply tax as damaging the chances

for collectivizing production. Patenaude, "Bolshevism in Retreat," 168, citing *EZ*, 5 March 1921.

75. Eighth Congress, 10-45.

76. Deluded supporters: Tkachev at the Eighth Congress, 139; Varga, *La regularisation*, 5-10. Critics: L. Mitrofanov, *EZ*, 21 December 1920; see also Lenin, PSS, 42:193.

77. Eighth Congress, 132-4; Osinskii, *Vosstanovleni*, 13-4.

78. For details, see *Dekrety*, 151-8, 10 January 1921.

79. This discussion of the democratic centralists is based on the presentation by Osinskii and his colleagues (T.V. Sapronov and V.M. Maksimovskii) at the Ninth Party Congress in March 1920, and does not include their critique of internal party organization.

80. T.V. Sapronov, in *Protokoly deviatogo s"ezda RKP(b)*, (Moscow, 1934), 148-51. (Hereafter cited as "Ninth Party Congress.") All three major democratic centralists had experience working in the provincial state apparatus.

81. Ninth Party Congress, Moscow, 1934, 131. The democratic centralists would have approved of Khrushchev's *sovnarkhoz* reforms.

82. Osinskii's reference to "red governors" puts his critique into the context of a long-standing conflict within Russian political culture between what I have called the "gubernatorial solution" and the "enlistment solution." For a detailed description, see *Bread and Authority*, Chapter 2.

83. For the food-supply conferences, see the article by S. Minkevich, *Pravda*, 24 November 1920, and Lih, *Bread and Authority*, 212-13.

84. Ninth Party Congress, 124-5. Osinskii did not repeat this argument when he refered to militarization in his article of 5 September 1920.

85. *Biulletin*, 30 November 1920.

86. The argument is spelled out by Kuraev, Eighth Congress, 132-4; see also Teodorovich on 123-7. Osinskii's rationale can be found in *Pravda*, 25 June and 9 November 1920.

(One speaker at the Eighth Congress, Kaminskii, criticized the legislation for not being dictatorial enough. Eighth Congress, 131-2.)

87. Eighth Congress, 146-7. Ironicallly, one critic on this score was Aleksandr Shlikhter, a food-supply official known as a super-centralizer.

88. *Pravda*, 9 November 1920.

89. See Sviderskii, *EZ*, 22 and 26 December 1920. On the other hand, the bill was presented to the congress by Teodorovich, an agricultural official.

90. *Pravda*, 12 December 1920; for similar remarks by Bogdanov, see *EZ*, 16 October 1920. See also M. Vladimirov, *Udarnye momenty prodovolstvennoi raboty na Ukraine* (Kharkov, 1921), 22-4.

91. Osinskii, *Pravda*, 5 September and 5 November 1920; V. Filippov, *EZ*, 1 October 1920.

92. Bogdanov, *EZ*, 2 December 1920; Eighth Congress, speakers Buianov (134-7), Lezhnev and Ishchenko (141-3).

93. See the Kuraev article in *Pravda*, 19 December 1920.

94. *Pravda*, 12 December 1920.

95. *Dekrety*, 155.

96. Eighth Congress, 132-4. Kuraev himself put forward the name "observer committees"; Larin suggested "peasant production councils." The official title as "peasant committees for the imporvement of agricultural production."

97. *Biulletin*, 30 November 1920.

98. *Sessii vserossiiskogo tsentralhogo ispolnitelnogo komiteta, VIII sozyva* (Moscow, 1922), 20 March 1921, 103-4.

99. Sviderskii, cited in *Biulletin*, 30 November 1920.

100. See the resolutions presented at the Eighth Congress by the Mensheviks (199-200), the Left SRs (120-2) and the SRs (48-51).

101. *Pravda*, 5 April, 10 April, 13 May, 15 May, 26 May 1921. For a description of the problems both of the village committees and the sowing committees, see the telegram of 4 April 1921 in *Leninskii Sbornik*, 20:72-3.

102. Lenin, PSS, 42:144, 154, 178-80, 182-4, 191-2 and passim.

103. Lenin, PSS, 42:382-6. The meeting took place on 22 December 1920. In favor of the industrious category were speakers from Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Kursk, Tula, Kostroma, Novgorod, Perm; in favor of the kulak category were those from Cherepovets, Penza, Riazan, Demianskii, Samara.

104. In the very first draft of the food-supply tax decision, Lenin called for using lowered tax rates as a way of rewarding the industriousness of the peasant. Lenin, PSS, 42:333, 8 February 1921.

105. Lenin, PSS, 42:142.

106. Lenin, PSS, 42:141-5; see also 5-6. For Lenin's dilemma in its widest context, see Theodore Von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective* (Oxford, 1987).

107. Lenin, PSS, 42:363-4 (28 February 1921). This is almost the last speech in Volume 42; for a very similar formulation at the beginning, see 42:5-6. Lenin's diagnosis was picked up in *Kalendar*, 120-2.

108. *Dekrety*, 118-120.

109. For Bogdanov's insightful remarks on this issue, see *EZ*, 16 October 1920.

110. The cited remark on getting carried away with the kulak may be his last publicly recorded use of this term.

111. An anti-Bolshevik writer in Russia at the time wrote that the aims of the program were rather ordinary; his criticism was reserved for Bolshevik incompetence in execution. A. Terne, *V tsarstve Lenina* (Berlin, 1922), 211-19.

112. Two recent accounts that view the sowing committees in terms of War Communism are Poliakov, *Perekhod k NEPu*, 213-30, and Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organization for War Communism* (Cambridge, 1985), 445-50 The reader of Poliakov and Malle is given the impression that Osinskii scorned all material incentives and proposed very ambitious and detailed socialist regulation as an answer to the agricultural crisis of 1920. Malle, for example, writes that "the ultimate end of the law on the seed committees – through not explicitly stated – was the collectivizaton of land." Such blatant misreadings of the record do not reflect credit on the stereotyped views about War Communism that inspired them. Preferable to Malle are two earlier accounts in English: Michael S. Farbman, *Bolshevism in Retreat*, (London, 1923), 246-57, and Lancelot Lawton, *An Economic History of Soviet Russia*, 2 vols. 1:174-9.

113. For recent Soviet writings, see my article "NEP: An Alternative for Soviet Socialism," in *The Soviet Union under Gorbachev*, eds. Stephen Cohen and Michael Kraus (New York, 1990). Among Western scholars holding similar views are Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York, 1985), especially 261; Stephen Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (Oxford, 1985), especially 49; Robert Tucker, *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev* (New York, 1987), especially 61.

114. N. Dolinsky (a high food-supply official both under the Tsar and the Provisional Government) in *Izvestiia po prodovolstvennomu delu*, No. 1, 5-9. For a longer statement by Struve along these lines, see Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Right, 1905-1944* (Cambridge: Mass., 1980), 224.

115. For a discussion of this neglected aspect of the 1917 land committees, see Lih, *Bread and Authority*, 91-97.

116. The point is well made in the context of 1917 by S. A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917-1918* (Cambridge, 1983), 153.

117. Lenin, PSS, 42:137-8. Eighth Congress, 197-9.

118. V. Karpinskii, asking the lucky to help the unlucky with sowing, in *Na borbu*, 75-8.

119. E. B. Genkina, *Gosudarstvennaia deiatelnost V. I. Lenina, 1921-1923* (Moscow, 1967); Iurkov, *Ekonomicheskaia politika*. These are the best published accounts of the sowing-committee legislation.

120. Kritsman, *Geroicheskii period russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1924[?]), 208-16.

121. Lenin, PSS, 43:80-81; 44:313-4. See also 43:272-3.

122. *Pravda*, 25 March 1921.

123. *Pravda*, 5 April 1921.

124. For the consistency of Osinskii's outlook, compare Ninth Party Congress, 199; *Pravda*, 5 April 1921; *Vosstanovlene*, 13-4. In a short autobiography written in the late 1920s, Osinskii says that while Lenin was very interested in Osinskii's plans, he energetically protested against the element of coercion *(prinuditelnost)*. Lenin went on to draw the conclusion that War Communism was no longer viable. When Osinskii began work in the Agriculture commissariat in early 1921, he was forced to carry out, not an ambitious "state regulation of agriculture," but merely "well-planned and organized campaigns" (*planomerno organizovannye kampanii*). See *Deiateli SSSR i revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia Rossii: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar Granat*, Moscow, 1989 reprint, page 573.

Osinskii's retrospective comment must be taken with due seriousness. Still, the political pressure to give all the credit to Lenin may have led Osinskii to be unfair to himself. The documents show that "well-planned and organized campaigns" were always Osinskii's uppermost concern.

125. Stephan Merl, *Die Anfange der Kollektivierung in der Sowjetunion* (Wiesbaden, 1985), especially pp 119, 136, 146.