U.S.-U.S.S.R. Détente: Bumpy Progress on the Agricultural Front

Détente between the United States and the Soviet Union is a mighty design whose momentum is not appreciably impeded even by obstacles such as last year's Arab-Israeli war. Much less is it likely to be halted by a speck of dust in one of its tinier cogs—the fact that the Soviet Union has defaulted on the first test of its intentions under the U.S.–U.S.S.R. agricultural exchange agreement.

In return for research data and farm equipment, the Soviets undertook to start supplying by the end of February agricultural production statistics of the type that would prevent the United States being taken for another 1972 wheat sale. But the data the Russian deputy minister of agriculture handed over to the American agricultural attaché in Moscow last month turned out to be scarcely more detailed than the figures published every year in *Pravda*. "They're well short of what was agreed to," says Roger S. Euler, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's chief specialist on Soviet agricultural production.

Government officials shrug off the Soviets' failure to provide the agreed figures by the due date—these are early days yet, the agreement has not yet got into full swing. The first Soviet statistics were provided only a few days ago, and already the American attaché in Moscow has wheedled more data out of the Soviet ministry of agriculture. (These supplementary figures go somewhat beyond *Pravda* but are "still well short" of what the Russians agreed to provide, says Euler.)

One reason for the apparent unconcern of American officials may be their professed belief that the agreement holds tangible advantages for both sides. Far from being Danegeld to keep the Russians sweet, the agreement would be worth having even without détente, they say. That a mutually beneficial exchange could be constructed is, on the face of things, surprising—American agriculture is the most advanced in the world, while the Soviet Union's is notorious for its endemic setbacks.

The agricultural agreement between the United States and the U.S.S.R. is part of a package of similar deals on matters such as oceanography, transportation, and atomic energy, which followed from détente. The outline of the agreement was negotiated last May, the pact was signed by President Nixon during his Moscow visit in June, and the details were worked out at a third meeting, held in Moscow last November.

What emerged from the November meeting is a dry accord which to a surprising degree reflects each side's long-range economic and political goals. A principal aim of the United States is to provide research and technology to beef up Soviet livestock production, with the explicit purpose of creating markets for American feed grains and soybeans. The Soviet Union, for its part, intends to improve its people's diet significantly within the next 5 years, a goal that can only be met by importing the technology of American agricultural mechanization.

Russians Want Farm Machinery

At the November meeting in Moscow, American negotiators were at a disadvantage, in that essentially all American research is published openly and is available to anyone who wants it. The Russians can also obtain all the production statistics they want by subscribing to the publications of the USDA. It soon became clear that the Russians' principal desire was for mechanization. The American bargaining position that developed was that the United States would discuss technology if the U.S.S.R. would talk about supplying production statistics. The Russians agreed, and two working groups were set up, one on technology and one on economics.

The technology part of the agreement covers a range of subjects from research to mechanization. The original shopping list submitted by the Russians was so long as to be unmanageable. The first stage, starting in May, is for each side to send ten teams of scientists to visit laboratories in the other country, after which scientists will be exchanged to work in locations of interest. A principal American goal is to obtain samples from the Soviet collections of germ plasm, particularly in cereals. (Winter wheat and the varieties resistant to rust are native to Russia.)

"We got 90 percent of what we wanted from the agreement," says Billy E. Caldwell, the USDA scientist who acted as front man for the technology negotiating team. The chief exception was a request for access to Russian technology for mechanized operations in sub-Arctic regions: "They were unwilling to give us anything there, maybe because of the defense implications—it's obvious we caught them off guard."

Caldwell, who was formerly with the Office of Science and Technology, stresses that Russian scientists visiting the United States will receive the same treatment as American scientists get in Russia. "If our people don't get into the proper labs and are put on the tourist trip to Moscow, Kiev, and Leningrad, we can play games too, and their people will just get Washington, Chicago, and Dallas. We are not going down the road blindly."

The mechanization part of the program—a one-way flow in the Russians' direction—is likely to proceed more slowly, if only because for the next 12 to 18 months the production capacity of U.S. manufacturers will be entirely taken up in satisfying the surging domestic demand for farm machinery. But the Soviets are not in the habit of making bulk purchases of goods, and trade is likely to be in the form of licensing. Is there a danger of U.S. firms having nothing else to sell once they have licensed their technology to the Soviet Union? "No, because we will be developing new technology faster than they can, and they will need to buy new licenses every 5 years or so," says Emmett Barker, executive secretary of the Chicago-based Farm and Industrial Equipment Institute. American agricultural mechanization is 15 to 20 years ahead of the Soviet Union's, Barker states. The key to successful trade, he says, will be "responsible" behavior by the Soviet Union, for example in respecting American patent rights.

The agreement arrived at by the economics working party is regarded as something of a breakthrough by the American side. The Russians argued that since they were a net importer of agricultural goods they needed to keep their production data secret for fear of being exploited by those they had to

buy from. The American side contended that it was in the Soviets' own interest to provide the data because if they were going to need wheat, say, the United States needed to know how much to plant. (With the export reporting system instituted last June, the Russians will not be able to pull off another wheat deal.) In what was a definite concession, the Russians agreed to provide production data. Ten categories of data were decided upon at the November meeting. The first category, to be supplied by February 1974, is the "area, yield and production of all crops individually (data for preceding 10 years)." The list the Soviet ministry of agriculture provided last month gives figures for 1913 as well as the last 10 years, presumably to show the collective farms have made some progress, but the data fail to meet the agreed specifications. Some crops, such as tobacco, are not listed at all, while grains are lumped in a single figure with a separate listing only for wheat.

A more important feature of the economics agreement is a provision for exchange of data about the current Soviet situation and outlook at two annual face-to-face meetings, the first of which is scheduled for April or May. "If the meetings turn out to be limited, the whole thing will be quite disappointing to us. This is what we need to avoid another 1972," says USDA economist Euler.

The secretariat for the exchange agreement is headed on the American side by John M. Beshoar, a former Foreign Service officer now with the USDA. Beshoar sees the agreement as "very advantageous to us—it would be worthwhile even without détente."

Historically the Russians have gone through periods of buying in Western technology, followed by a slamming of the door when they have got what they needed. Beshoar, however, believes that this time the basis exists for a long term trading relationship between the two countries. The wheat purchase of 1972 was one indication of a Russian decision to put trade with the West above economic autarchy at the expense of the Soviet consumer. But trade will not blossom overnight. "They have just as many reservations about us as a supplier as we have about them as a buyer," he observes. The Soviets have tried, not very successfully, to develop markets in the United States. As trade expands, Beshoar says, an obvious way for them to cover the cost of their imports would be by sale of raw materials, such as Siberian liquid natural gas.

The agriculture pact between the two countries might easily have been either purely cosmetic or of less than equal value to the United States. In fact, the two sides have worked out an exchange that may yield solid advantages for both and, if so, will create a substantial measure of trading interdependence.

—NICHOLAS WADE

Land Use: Rules Panel and Nixon Leave House Bill in Limbo

National land use legislation appeared to be moving toward relatively easy passage when, on 26 February, the House Rules Committee quite unexpectedly voted by a 9-to-4 majority to defer floor action on it indefinitely.

The pending measure, the "Land Use Planning Act of 1974," would encourage state governments to assert themselves in many of the larger matters of land use planning and control. It has been rated by environmentalists, Nixon Administration officials, and prominent legislators such as Senator Henry M. Jackson as deserving a high priority on the congressional agenda.

Whether the Rules Committee can be persuaded to reverse itself and allow a floor vote on this bill is as yet unclear. Whatever happens, the recent committee action is a revealing commentary on the politics of land use and the present state of things on Capitol Hill and at the White House. Consider the following:

● *Absence of leadership by the Speaker of the House.* The blocking of floor action on the land use measure —legislation already passed by the Senate and overwhelmingly approved (in a form slightly different from the Senate version) by the House Interior Committee—represents still another case of drift and confusion in the Congress. Speaker Carl Albert (D–Okla.) wants the bill brought to the floor. Yet, even though the Democrats on the Rules Committee are in a sense an arm of the majority leadership, six of the ten of them joined in the vote to defer action on the bill indefinitely. The Speaker had never discussed the bill with the committee, nor had the committee's 82-year-old chairman, Ray Madden (D–Ind.), ever consulted him about it.

● *Inconstancy at the White House.* Ever since early 1971, President Nixon has been calling for the enactment of land use legislation in a form quite similar to the pending bill. In fact, on 29 January, a few days after this measure was reported from the Interior Committee, Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton expressed satisfaction with it and asked for its speedy enactment. Despite this, Republican Minority Leader John Rhodes of Arizona was able, on authority from the White House, to inform the Rules Committee that the President preferred a weak substitute measure sponsored by Representative Sam Steiger of Arizona. Rhodes recommended deferral of House action on the pending bill, and, of the four Republican members of the committee who were present, three voted in favor of such action.

● *Potent opposition at the Eleventh Hour.* Land use legislation, however bland it may seem when considered in the abstract, is inherently political in that constraints on the exercise of private property rights are implied. This explains why, even at this late hour in the pending bill's legislative history, strong opposition from conservatives and some economic and development interests is emerging.

The bill, perceived by its supporters as a modest and long-overdue response to a major national problem, is far more than a "planning act." It calls for a partial shift in the locus of political authority over land use matters—this at the expense of local officials, many of whom have had a