

## Stabilising the USSR's rural population through development of the social infrastructure

B. N. KHOMELYANSKY \*

One of the aims of social progress is to eliminate material differences in living standards between town and country. In so far as movements of the rural population derive in part from such differences, they will obviously have to be taken increasingly into account in long-term planning and forecasting.

The majority of industrially developed countries have witnessed a marked decline in their rural population. By the middle of this century rural outmigration had assumed such proportions that it is now sometimes referred to as "the great transmigration of peoples of the twentieth century".

According to data published by the Population Commission of the UN Economic and Social Council, the world's rural population declined from 81 per cent of the total in 1920 to 64 per cent in 1970. Forecasts suggest that by the year 2000 it will account for only half the population of the globe. In 1980 the rural population was expected to have dropped to 21 per cent of the total in North America (United States and Canada), 38 per cent in the USSR and 33 per cent in the rest of Europe.

The rates of urbanisation in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are significantly outstripping the growth of manufacturing industry and construction. More people are streaming to the cities in search of work and better living conditions than the cities can provide with jobs. All this leads to a heightening of social tensions.

The contribution of rural migration to the formation of the urban population is particularly important in the initial stages of industrialisation, though the specific causes of the increase in the urban population, as well as its rate of growth, vary from country to country and depend on economic and social circumstances.

In most of the socialist States, too, the postwar period has been characterised by a substantial reduction in the rural population. Rural outmigration was particularly rapid in Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia.

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\* Candidate of Economics; Reader, Novosibirsk Electrotechnical Institute of Communication.

The smallest outflow of rural population was recorded in Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic, which were already more industrialised and urbanised when they began the process of socialist reconstruction.

Persistent rural-urban migration has also taken place in the Soviet Union. While the country's total population increased by 60 per cent between 1913 and 1979, the urban population rose to nearly six times its previous level and the rural population declined in absolute terms by 31.7 million. Over the past 10 to 15 years approximately 1.5 million people, some two-thirds of them of working age, have moved from the countryside to the towns each year.

## **Rural outmigration and demographic policy**

There is no single demographic policy that will be appropriate in every country and region of the world. The only universally applicable principle on which demographic policy can be based is the need to establish a rational correspondence between the level of production and the size of population. Finding the optimal correlation between these two factors is an objective necessity for any country, but actually achieving the right proportion is no simple matter. Each case requires individual scientific investigation. In any event it is perfectly clear that, depending on the characteristics of a country or region and also on the specific objectives pursued in a given historical period, demographic policies will not only have to differ but may even be diametrically opposed. Abstract reasoning based on global indicators is no use whatever in this case.

The following article is concerned with these problems only in so far as they affect the Soviet Union at the present stage of its development. It should be noted, however, that some of the lessons to be drawn from the trends examined here, which seem to us to have the weight of objective natural laws, may be of value to a greater or lesser extent in solving agrarian problems in other countries too.

The economic preconditions for the migration of the rural population are the release of labour through the mechanisation of production (particularly in rural regions with a high population density) and the availability of jobs in the large urban industrial centres. The experience of many countries shows that scientific and technical progress in agriculture can only be effectively achieved on the basis of all-round mechanisation and electrification of the production processes and substantial investment in advanced equipment.

In certain historical circumstances rural migration performs the important progressive function of replenishing the labour resources of the towns.

Whether rural outmigration is desirable depends on the over-all balance of labour resources: it is essential to establish whether there is a current shortage or a surplus of labour in the countryside. Rural-urban migration must not disturb the balance of labour resources in agriculture or favour

interests elsewhere if it means causing economic disruption in the rural areas. It is a progressive phenomenon as long as agricultural output continues to rise and the decline in the rural workforce is offset by an increase in the efficiency of the agricultural workers who remain.

In the USSR at present, however, the rates of increase in labour productivity and output for the economy as a whole are several times higher than the corresponding indicators for agriculture. In these circumstances, rather than putting up artificial barriers to the outflow of labour from the countryside, one should try to ensure its rational distribution between branches and regions so as to enhance over-all production efficiency.

For the present there is a large outflow of workers from Republics and regions in which labour is already in extremely short supply (especially the North-West, Volga-Vyatka, Central, Far-East and West Siberian regions), and this is of course producing a growing shortage of agricultural workers.

Young people form the most mobile section of the rural population. Now that it is possible to acquire skills in a relatively short space of time, industry, construction and other non-agricultural branches are calling more and more for the services of young workers.

There is a particularly high level of mobility among machine operators (multi-skilled workers). In the coming 10 to 15 years the need for machine operators in agriculture will double whereas their absolute numbers will not in fact grow. Additional training of machine operators will barely offset their departure to other branches of the national economy.

Migration also leads to significant changes in the demographic structure of the rural population: there is a decline in the number of workers in the most active age-group (20 to 49 years) and a rise in the proportion of older persons, which combine to produce a less favourable demographic profile, and there is a considerable outflow of skilled personnel.

Theoretical study of the problem of rural outmigration—and practical recommendations to alleviate it—must be based on consideration of not only the economic but also the social consequences of such movements. In present conditions it has become very important to rationalise the interaction of man with nature and for society to devote greater attention to the preservation of the environment.

## **Causes of rural-urban migration**

Contemporary economic literature devotes considerable space to problems of rural migration, the causes of the phenomenon and possible ways of eliminating its harmful effects. In order to foresee and control migration trends it is necessary to study the characteristics and influence of all the various factors which combine to make up the complex pattern of rural living conditions. Such an approach deepens our knowledge of the nature and mechanics of migration processes and contributes to a positive solution of the urgent problems they present.

Sociological studies show that there is nothing haphazard about the redistribution of labour resources through migration. The underlying causes of labour migration, despite their outwardly diverse and chaotic appearance, can be subdivided fairly precisely into those of an economic, cultural/utilitarian and socio-psychological nature. The first group includes those causes which relate to production and the distribution of the social product, the profitability of subsidiary farming, turnover and conditions of work. The second group relates to the stage reached in the development of the social infrastructure in the countryside: the availability of well built modern housing, communal and everyday consumer services, means of transport and communications (the so-called physical infrastructure), and the possibility of satisfying social and spiritual needs—education, culture and health (the so-called socio-economic infrastructure). The third group embraces subjective considerations: attitudes to agricultural work, personal motivations, family and other circumstances, which in many ways synthesise the influence of the economic and social factors.

The values of the rural population are changing in the course of economic and social development. This must not be overlooked when efforts are made to improve and regulate the distribution of labour resources. What was accepted yesterday is quite inadequate today, and some of the measures currently aimed at stabilising the rural population are ineffective and must be replaced.

Efforts to stabilise the rural population by non-economic means have not achieved the desired result. Any direct, administrative measure only serves to amplify the uncontrollable reactions of potential and actual migrants. Experience in the years immediately following the Second World War showed that state intervention may temporarily mitigate the negative effects of the process but does not really solve the problem. It is necessary, therefore, to strengthen non-administrative controls on rural outmigration and to influence the circumstances that affect individual behaviour patterns, i.e. to act upon the socio-economic environment in which a person lives and works.

To return to the point with which we began this article, one of the most significant gains of developed socialism is the substantial reduction of disparities it has achieved in the level and structure of material consumption of the rural and urban populations. As regards consumption of food and non-food products, the rural population is catching up with the town-dwellers and only insignificant differences still remain. The gap between the earnings of collective farmers and manual workers was halved between 1960 and 1980 (during this period collective farmers' earnings rose from 35.1 to 68.2 per cent of manual workers'). Here it must be borne in mind that in the rural regions a significant proportion of food produced on private plots is consumed directly instead of being traded, which further reduces the disparity in real incomes.

By comparison with the pre-revolutionary period, the real incomes of industrial and building workers have increased some 10 times while the

incomes of peasants have risen about 15 times. In constant prices the payments and benefits to which collective farmers are entitled under the social consumption funds, including pensions, temporary disability benefit, assistance for mothers with large families and social and cultural expenditure, are more than 50 times higher than the benefits payable before the Revolution.

The increase in the material prosperity of collective farmers is, as experience shows, a necessary but not a sufficient condition for discouraging rural migration. What it all boils down to is the need for an all-round approach to improving conditions of life in the countryside and for paying more attention to those aspects which hitherto—in comparison with the effort devoted to raising earnings—have been relatively neglected.

A characteristic feature of a developed socialist society is the workers' increased awareness of their social and spiritual needs, satisfaction of which is not only dependent on but a necessary condition for social, scientific and technical progress. At the present stage of economic development many of these needs have come to be regarded as basic necessities of life, while high levels of culture, education and technical training have become an inalienable attribute of the workforce. The needs of the rural population in these respects are best satisfied by doing everything possible to facilitate the harmonious development of the worker's personality and his intellectual, moral and physical capacities.

In considering the question of equalising the living standards of the rural and urban populations, it should be noted that the statistical indicators traditionally used in this connection were established rather a long time ago. Analysis of statistical data shows that according to some indicators—number of schoolchildren and students, film projectors, clubs and library books per head of population—the countryside has even outstripped the towns; according to others—number of radio receivers, newspapers and magazines—the towns are minimally better off; while according to a third group of indicators—number of television sets and availability of consumer services—the towns still have an advantage but one that is steadily diminishing. The figures appear to point to a progressive reduction in the disparities between urban and rural living standards. More detailed examination, however, reveals that two vital factors have to be borne in mind: the qualitative change that is taking place in the spiritual needs of the rural population, and the real possibility of satisfying these through the new approach to population settlement outlined below.

The commonly held view that the basic cause of rural migration is the "surplus" of educated young people is somewhat superficial. There are certainly a significant number of secondary school leavers among migrants. But they head for the towns not so much because of a mismatch between their education and the type of work available in the country (although this is a contributory factor) as because of dissatisfaction with the cultural and living environment itself.

Sociological studies make it possible to identify the reasons why so many rural inhabitants would prefer to live in towns, which no doubt coincide with the real causes of migration. One questionnaire survey among rural inhabitants revealed the following opinions: the urban population has a higher general standard of living (30.4 per cent of respondents); more free time (19.9 per cent); better services (19.0 per cent); better educational facilities (9.2 per cent); and higher pay (6.9 per cent).<sup>1</sup>

In the opinion of those who have done research on the matter, 80 per cent of all the social and psychological causes of migration that might be overcome are due to the longing of countryfolk for the amenities that are commonly available in the towns, and it is now more than ever essential that the social infrastructure (education, culture, health care, housing and everyday consumer services) should be rapidly developed in the rural areas.

## **The influence of the social infrastructure on rural migration**

Production in any socio-economic system does not stand still. Its constant development or improvement is a general economic law. With social progress man himself changes and the universe of his ideas expands. His existing needs grow and new ones emerge.

There is no substantial difference between the scale on which skilled workers are needed in the countryside and in the towns. Yet the rural areas lack sufficient modern housing and communal amenities to attract and retain them, while everyday consumer services and sporting facilities, secondary schools and hospitals are few and far between. All this obviously affects the attitude of the country-dweller to the environment in which he lives.

To take another example, the typical rural primary school is five times smaller than its urban counterpart and the rural secondary school 2.4 times smaller. In small schools it is difficult to keep the staff fully occupied and there are fewer opportunities for teamwork and co-operation in teaching. This has repercussions on the skills of the staff and on the quality of the teaching, which in turn makes it more difficult for the pupils to enter higher and specialised secondary educational establishments.

The countryside has an acute need for the development of the vocational training system, and it would clearly be advantageous if the leading collective and state farms were themselves to set up training facilities providing courses for specialists with secondary qualifications. When located close to the point of production, the vocational technical school combines the benefits of the state training system with the advantage of stabilising the rural population.

The level of development in the cultural and health spheres has a similar effect to education on the scale of rural migration. Many rural settlements do not have any kind of permanent cultural infrastructure. Often the activities of the clubs, libraries and other cultural facilities do not fully measure up to the

workers' growing demands. Culture and the mass media are primarily oriented to the rural population having at most a secondary education, with the result that the spiritual and intellectual needs of the best educated workers are not fully satisfied. This cannot but have negative consequences.

The best way of resolving these problems and strengthening the cultural infrastructure is through judicious orientation of state investment policy, i.e.:

- when drawing up economic and social development plans for the Union Republics priority should be given to capital investment for the establishment of rural cultural centres;
- undertakings should be given the right to construct clubs and Palaces of Culture according to a standard pattern and capable of accommodating up to 600 people out of capital investment funds earmarked for production purposes (without cutting down on basic operating capacity);
- encouragement should be given to the development and widespread use of mobile technical facilities (mobile clubrooms and libraries, portable film projectors, etc.) for servicing settlements in which there is no permanent cultural infrastructure.

Medical care for the rural population is provided in accordance with nation-wide criteria and this is reducing disparities in the utilisation of health services. In practice, however, the existence of isolated rural settlements and the prevalence of small health establishments (clinics and district hospitals) make it difficult to provide medical services of a uniformly high standard.

Long-term national health plans indicate possible ways of tackling the problem, e.g.:

- strengthening the structure of the health service in the countryside through the use of additional material resources supplied by the production collectives;
- providing rural localities with greater numbers of skilled medical personnel;
- ensuring easier access to specialised establishments and polyclinics in the towns.

The rural areas are also substantially less favoured than the towns as regards the provision of pre-school establishments. At the same time the birth rate in the countryside is higher than in the towns (12 per cent higher in 1977). Most pre-school establishments are housed in premises which in terms of construction and equipment do not come up to modern standards. Many kindergartens and crèches function only while work is going on in the fields. The shortage of facilities of this sort naturally makes it more difficult to persuade mothers of young children to take up outside employment.

As already intimated, it is essential that more and more consumer service undertakings be set up in the rural areas. Per head of population the density of such undertakings is particularly low as regards personal tailoring, repairs of domestic appliances, dry-cleaning, dyeing and laundries.

Until recently services of this sort were provided in the country districts by regional consumer service establishments, but because these only had small workshops they were not in a position to satisfy the growing needs of the population. In many parts of the country this system has now been replaced by the introduction of regional production departments which collect and distribute orders through a number of reception points. Services are provided by specialised undertakings, which are reaching out to ever larger sections of the rural population.

Among all the various measures designed to stabilise the rural population, paramount importance attaches to well built housing. The volume of housing construction in the countryside is rising each year. Between 1970 and 1978 alone it totalled 293.2 million square metres of floor space, or 43.2 per cent of the floor space built in the towns.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these rapid rates of housing construction one ought not to overlook certain of the difficulties involved. The erection of multi-storey apartment blocks is not always warranted. Account has to be taken of the psychology of the country-dweller and his actual living conditions. In the countryside individual housing predominates (roughly 70 per cent on state farms and 95 per cent on collective farms). State planning plays a lesser role here. In recent years there has been a drop in the sales of housing equipment and appliances, which is linked to a shortage of building materials and an underestimation of the scale of individual housing construction.

Additional possibilities and resources for the development of the social infrastructure arise with the formation of inter-farm organisations. The construction materials industry is being developed in the countryside; more and more inter-farm construction undertakings are being set up and intensive use is being made of local financial resources. This brings us to a comparatively recent phenomenon that both depends on and could do much to promote the stabilisation of the rural population.

## **The special contribution of the agro-industrial complex (AIC)**

The main purpose of the study of rural migration is to arrive at reliable general conclusions which will make it possible in a socialist society to develop effective means of influencing the migration process. Such measures can be regarded as an essential part of demographic policy.

One of the common shortcomings of research into migration, in our view, is the tendency to equate the rationale of releasing labour from agricultural production with the advisability of rural-urban migration. This does not take account of the social and economic realities of the present-day rural scene.

Among the forms in which the further collectivisation of production in a developed socialist society manifests itself is planned agro-industrial integration—and specifically what is known as the agro-industrial complex (AIC).



This process of integration assumes paramount importance because of the real opportunity it provides for converting agriculture to an industrial base.

An AIC has three basic divisions:

- the industrial branch, which turns out agricultural equipment;
- direct agricultural production (crop and livestock farming), which is the core of the complex;
- the branches engaged in the storage, processing and transportation of agricultural produce.

In 1972 the first of these divisions occupied 10.9 per cent of the workforce, the second 66.2 per cent and the third 22.9 per cent, but this distribution is constantly changing. While there is a certain degree of stability in the need for labour in the industrial branch (bearing in mind the increase in labour productivity), the number of workers employed directly in crop and livestock farming is declining rapidly. The proportion of workers engaged in the agrarian sector of the USSR has declined from one-half of the total labour force in the pre-war period to one-fifth today.

A more detailed analysis of labour force trends in AICs shows that the need for labour is growing in those branches that are ancillary to direct agricultural production. Rough calculations show that, with the transfer of agriculture to an industrial base, for every worker engaged directly in agricultural production the other AIC divisions will in future require no fewer than two. The need for additional labour in the third AIC division is connected with the construction and development of industrial undertakings in the countryside. For the fact is that in the socialist countries industry is swiftly invading agriculture. Huge untapped natural resources are being mobilised in the service of the national economy.

Up to now the bulk of agricultural production has been processed in the towns by large industrial undertakings. When these were set up it was as a rule with the intention of reaping the advantages of concentrated production and no attention at all was paid to the possible damage to society and, above all, agriculture. The trouble is that, for the majority of these undertakings, agricultural raw materials are delivered not only from the nearest but also from very distant locations. This leads to considerable transportation costs, spoilage and a lowering of agricultural efficiency. But the problem also has a more urgent aspect. The industrialisation of agriculture, when looked at from the viewpoint of the national economy, involves much more than mere economic considerations. The problem is a socio-economic one conditioned by the need to improve social relations in the countryside.

One illustration of the contribution agro-industrial units can make in this field is the fact that they establish a common balance-sheet and declare a common profit without distinction as to which branch (industrial or agricultural) has made it. This principle of profit formation is important for the development of the social infrastructure, since it allows material resources to be channelled towards the satisfaction of collective needs.

Concretely, agro-industrial integration is brought about in the following main ways: the creation of inter-farm undertakings (or organisations); the formation of agro-industrial undertakings (state farms/factories); the construction of industrial plant in the countryside and the strengthening of its interaction with agricultural production through the development of agro-industrial complexes.

The number of inter-farm undertakings, organisations and associations has doubled in the past decade while the number of workers employed in them has increased sixfold. But every branch of the AICs is crying out for additional labour. The need for labour in inter-farm construction organisations is also growing fast.

Proceeding from the undeniable fact that agro-industrial integration in the processing of agricultural raw materials is being intensified, it can be assumed that the near future will see a merging of the individual branches of agriculture with the processing industry, which should lead to the setting up of complexes for making finished products in the countryside. The establishment of AICs makes it possible to improve labour utilisation by evening out the predominantly seasonal nature of agricultural work. But this can only be achieved with the active participation of the rural population and by attracting additional skilled labour from the towns to the AICs, which in turn presupposes rapid development of the social infrastructure in the rural areas.

These circumstances force one to take a new look at what once seemed the inevitable onward march of rural outmigration. For the plain truth is that unless the rural population is stabilised (and a significant increase is achieved in agricultural labour productivity) agro-industrial integration will be impracticable and the underlying social problems will be insoluble.

## **Concluding remarks**

Large population centres afford practical possibilities of solving the vital problems involved in strengthening the social infrastructure and stabilising the rural population. Urbanisation naturally leads to a reduction in the number of small villages—between 1959 and 1970 the number of villages with fewer than 100 inhabitants declined by 304,000, or 40 per cent. According to statistical surveys carried out in the Russian Federation, such villages now accommodate only a tenth of the rural population of the Republic; on average, however, each collective and state farm still comprises 10 to 13 small villages.

The radical concentration of rural settlements would require the investment of enormous means: not less than 10 million roubles for a single medium-sized farm comprising 15 villages. Society is for the present not in a position to make such resources available. The solution of the problem seems to lie in the natural processes of agro-industrial integration and, no less important, intensive road-building.

The inhabitants of rural settlements possessing good transport communications with the towns can make more frequent use of urban cultural, educational, health, commercial and general services while continuing to work in the countryside. The better their transport links the more successfully the villages can develop and retain their inhabitants. It has been demonstrated that the costs of road construction in the countryside are recouped in practice in only two to three years. The establishment of inter-farm and state-collective farm road-building organisations as well as additional allocations of local government funds for the expansion of the rural transport system are now an urgent necessity. There is every reason for supposing that the improvement of public transport facilities, the extension of the all-weather road network and the spread of car ownership will help to weaken the urge to migrate.

Action to stabilise the rural population is being increasingly directed towards the development of rural agglomerations and their zones of influence, which with the passage of time are gradually transformed into urbanised regions. Agglomerations are an expression of the administrative, productive and economic unity of the surrounding territories and usually take the form of a town to which a number of villages gravitate economically and culturally.

In the past "town" was always opposed to "country". In the process of developing agglomerative forms of settlement, the previously clear distinctions between town and country are becoming blurred. The gradual incorporation of rural territories into heavily urbanised regions offers real prospects of stabilising the population, and incidentally eliminates the need for complete equality in the provisioning of villages and towns with everyday consumer, commercial, health and suchlike services.

The range of measures adopted in the USSR in the last few decades has helped to reduce the rate of rural outmigration. Whereas the share of the rural in the total population declined by 10 percentage points between 1951 and 1961 and by a further 7 between 1961 and 1971, the drop was only 6 points between 1971 and 1980. Such are the favourable results of raising the material and cultural living standards of the population and of creating a ramified social infrastructure in the countryside.

The importance of these trends in the social development of the countryside was highlighted at the recent XXVIth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. As the report delivered by Mr. Brezhnev<sup>3</sup> pointed out, "the industrialisation of agriculture produces far-reaching changes in the life of the collective-farm peasantry. Step by step their labour is drawing closer to that of factory workers." The Congress also mapped out concrete measures aimed at improving the cultural and everyday living standards of the rural population in order to eliminate existing differences between town and country.

The dialectically inter-related process of agro-industrial integration and stabilisation of the rural population holds out real prospects for smoothing the road to social progress.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> *Migratsia selskogo naselenia* (Moscow, 1970), pp. 156-158.

<sup>2</sup> Calculated from *Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR v 1978* (Moscow, Statistika, 1979), p. 394.

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Central Committee of the CPSU to the XXVI Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the immediate tasks of the Party in home and foreign policy* (Moscow, Novosti Press Agency, 1981).

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