

“The Two Faces of Petr Arkadeevich:  
Land and Dispossession in Russia’s Southwest, ca. 2000”

“*Kak eto, zemlia nasha—bez nas zhe prodolas’?*”

“How is it that our land was sold without us?”

*Okraina*, 1998

***Introduction***

Petr Arkadeevich Stolypin, Russia’s reformist prime minister (1906-1911) who oversaw a program to enclose land communes in forty-seven *gubernias* of the country, was, in the view of Sergei Witte, the prime minister who preceded him, “thickly coated from head to toe in provincial liberalism.”<sup>1</sup> Stolypin’s liberalism, however, extended only to economic ideas. His monarchical loyalties, his retrograde reform of suffrage law, and his persecution of political enemies suggested a harder disposition at odds with his vision of economic change. Widely reviled in Soviet historiography and the Russian public imagination, the erstwhile prime minister experienced a revival in Russian political life toward the end of the 1980s. After the fall of the Soviet Union, economic liberals seeking an antidote to Stalinist agriculture advanced a vision of an agrarian capitalist future based on Stolypin era land reforms.<sup>2</sup> That vision included the reorganization of collective and state farms and modernization through the creation of yeoman

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Except where otherwise noted, interviews were conducted by the author in Liski district, May 2000.

<sup>1</sup> Sviatoslav Rybas, “Petr Stolypin kak zerkalo dlia Vladimir Putina,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta* 22 February 2001, [http://www.ng.ru/style/2001-02-22/16\\_stolypin.html](http://www.ng.ru/style/2001-02-22/16_stolypin.html) (accessed 2 June 2006).

<sup>2</sup> David Macey, “Is Agrarian Privatization the Right Path? A Discussion of Historical Models,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 21:2-3 (1994), 164.

farms. The partition of early twentieth century land communes became the basis for a narrative of tradition that post-Soviet reformers used to advance a program of privatization.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the Stolypin-era reforms' centrality in marketing privatization in contemporary Russia, and despite procedural similarities between the two sets of reforms, the results of these efforts at land distribution were divergent, with, as Macey notes, a "complete dissimilarity of results."<sup>4</sup> What distinguished contemporary privatization from pre-communist efforts was the extent of dispossession. Rather than reproducing status quo ownership and labor relations, or solely encouraging adaptation to market conditions, privatization of land in post-Soviet Russia served as a mechanism for widespread dispossession and proletarianization.<sup>5</sup> Russian agricultural enterprises have experienced increases in production, productivity, and profits in recent years. However, labor incentives, land rents, and working conditions for worker-shareholders largely have not improved. The formation of property rights to land at the end of the twentieth century furthered the proletarianization of the peasantry that had begun under

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<sup>3</sup> More than fifteen years into post-Soviet land reforms, Russian social and political commentary continued to resurrect Stolypin in the service of a variety of arguments. For example, in March 2006 the Voronezh regional newspaper *Kommuna* urged the government to provide credit assistance to rural owners, noting, "How relevant Petr Arkadeevich [Stolypin]'s words are today!" Vladimir Shevchenko and Mikhail Lopyrev, "Spasti pashniu," *Kommuna* 17 March 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Macey, "Contemporary Agrarian Reforms in a Russian Historical Context," in David J. O'Brien and Stephen K. Wegren, eds. *Rural Reform in Post Soviet Russia* (Washington, D.C. and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) 191. For this reason, Macey's comparison of post-Soviet rural reform and Stolypin era reforms emphasizes the goals and process of reforms, rather than context or outcomes.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "privatization" here to emphasize the ways in which contemporary Russian rural reforms, which specified the destatification and reorganization of farms, and the individuation and partition of land and non-land asset shares, echo other contemporary efforts at privatization of the commons. Macey (2002) has argued that most of these elements were not privatization as such. I argue that while privatization was not the result, it was the manifest intent of reform.

Soviet rule, severing labor from control over the means of production. Moreover, property rights development failed to improve labor incentives, one of the central stated aims of privatization.

### ***Approaches to rural reform in Russia***

Among accounts of post-Soviet rural transformation, three approaches have emerged concerning the outcomes of land distribution programs. Some scholars have argued that despite the best hopes of Russian economic liberals, there has been no discernible change linked to rural reform policies.<sup>6</sup> Under this rubric, change is at best “cosmetic” or superficial—a revolution only of language. In one such formulation, there has been “no genuine reform process”<sup>7</sup>: the names for former collective and state farms (*kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy*) have changed, but actual patterns of land tenure, labor organization, and ownership have not. Others, meanwhile, have rejected the notion that agrarian reform reflects a mere “change of signboard.” These accounts call attention to individuals’ and enterprises’ adaptation to markets, emphasizing the role of personal disposition and other factors believed to drive entrepreneurial behavior.<sup>8</sup> Both of these perspectives capture important elements of the process and outcomes of land privatization in rural Russia, but they each fail to incorporate critical insights that the other brings to the table. I argue instead for a conceptualization of agrarian change that regards contemporary land rights as

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Maria Amelina, “Why Russian Peasants Remain in Collective Farms: A Household Perspective on Restructuring,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 41:7 (October-November 2000) and Max Spoor and Oane Visser, “The State of Agrarian Reform in the Former Soviet Union,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 53:6 (2001).

<sup>7</sup> Macey 2002, 191.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen K. Wegren, *The Moral Economy Reconsidered: Russia’s Search for Agrarian Capitalism* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

a modern Potemkin village: a façade of *de jure* ownership that masks deeper transformation—in this case, transformation that includes dispossession in the post-Soviet Russian countryside.<sup>9</sup>

This view shares with proponents of “cosmetic reform” the assessment that new property rights exist primarily in the world of bureaucracy. Worker-shareholders own land “on paper, on paper. And where that land is, who knows?”<sup>10</sup> The superficiality of change suggests more than a failure of institutional reform. It also has a purpose. Paper rights conceal processes of change that, while benefiting a few, resulted in dispossession for the many. Like the wooden facades that, according to legend, were constructed along Crimean roads to impress and mislead Tsarina Catherine the Great during her travels at the end of the eighteenth century, post-Soviet Potemkin villages convinced Moscow of local state officials’ loyalty and international lending and trade organizations of Russia’s commitment to property rights reform.<sup>11</sup>

That farm directors, members of district land committees, and other agricultural elites refused or failed to comply fully with demands emanating from Moscow should not suggest that elites opposed market reform as such. As Wegren argues, the logic of their behavior was economically rational and their response to reform adaptive.<sup>12</sup> Rural business elites resisted not the market, but the allocation of meaningful rights to worker-shareholders—such that those rights would have threatened the competitive advantage of enterprises or the personal fortunes of those elites. Some observers attribute business elites’ reluctance to implement reform to bureaucratic intransigence inherited from socialism. However, farm elites’ motivation in

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<sup>9</sup> Jessica Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Interview, farmer.

<sup>11</sup> A similar dynamic may be observed in Ukraine. Allina-Pisano, “Sub Rosa Resistance and the Politics of Economic Reform: Land Redistribution in Post-Soviet Ukraine,” *World Politics* 56:4 (July 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Wegren 2005.

obstructing certain elements of land privatization (all the while benefiting from other elements of it) was fundamentally market oriented. Wegren counters the claim that farm managers resisted reform by emphasizing managers' interest in profitability.<sup>13</sup> But adaptation to markets does not preclude maximization of self-interest and profit at the expense of the rights of new owners. Rather, a pro-market and anti-worker stance on the part of the economic elite is consistent with market adaptation. The two "faces" of the Stolypin reforms' late twentieth century incarnation are not incommensurable, but complementary.

Privatization failed to create new mechanisms of capital accumulation and reproduction, and the acquisition of property rights came at a high cost for many rural people. Some of this cost proceeded from the broader economic context into which private land rights were introduced. The urban bias of post-Soviet agrarian policy, and its negative effects on rural populations, has been documented widely.<sup>14</sup> As in so many other countries implementing similar reforms, interactive effects between land privatization and other elements of structural adjustment left rural people in a disadvantaged position.<sup>15</sup> In 1992, as the reorganization of agricultural enterprises began, Russia's borders opened to trade, price controls were lifted on most goods, and the government slashed budgets to resolve balance of payments problems.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Wegren, *Agriculture and the State in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998) and Wegren, O'Brien, and Patsiorkovski, "Why Russia's Rural Poor are Poor," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19:3 (2003).

<sup>15</sup> O'Brien et al. have observed an increase in durable consumer goods among villagers between 1995 and 1997. David O'Brien, Valery Patsiorkovski, and Larry Dershem, *Household Capital and the Agrarian Problem* (Burlington: Aldershot, 2000) 183-90. Such an increase was the explicit goal of proponents of the rapid economic reform known as "shock therapy." (Jeffrey Sachs, *Poland's Jump to the Market Economy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). However, greater access to one-time purchases such as televisions and VCRs is not necessarily evidence of ongoing access to mechanisms of capital accumulation. In the context of hyperinflation and currency fluctuation that accompanied post-Soviet land reform, people often acquired such goods because they had no way of holding the value of their savings otherwise.

Markets flooded with agricultural goods from abroad. Agricultural subsidy regimes in the west and cheap labor to the east kept prices low on imported goods, and Russian producers could not compete. The difficulty of extracting value from land ownership, together with changing payment structures for labor, deprived people in rural Russia of opportunities for capital accumulation during the early years of post-Soviet market development. As Hahamovitch and Halpern have observed in arguing for the inclusion of agricultural workers in class analysis, “Classes form in the countryside but they also unravel. States help build classes and destroy them, sometimes at the barrel of a gun, sometimes simply by letting prices fall or borders open.”<sup>16</sup>

The privatization of agricultural land in post-Soviet Russia is thus one thread of a broader narrative of dispossession in post-socialist societies.<sup>17</sup> Just as in cases of industrial privatization, the *de facto* managerial takeover of whole collective farms as if they were private possessions did not right historical wrongs. Post-Soviet privatization of farmland and agricultural enterprises did not involve restitution and was not a program to restore ownership to enterprise owners whose holdings previously had been nationalized. Instead, late twentieth century rural reform was to restore land to the tiller. The individuation and allocation of land that in many cases had no single owner prior to the socialist period, and the analogous distribution of shares in warehouses, office buildings, cow sheds, tractor parks, and other products of socialist-era labor, was meant to allow individuals to acquire shares in goods they had helped to maintain or

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<sup>16</sup> Cindy Hahamovitch and Rick Halpern, “Not a ‘Sack of Potatoes’: Why Labor Historians Need to Take Agriculture Seriously,” *International Journal of Labor and Working Class History* 65 (Spring 2004) 3-10.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Mieke Meurs and Rasika Ranasinghe, “De-Development in Post-Socialism: Conceptual and Measurement Issues,” *Politics and Society* 31:1 (March 2003) and Joma Nazpary, *Post-Soviet Chaos: Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

construct.<sup>18</sup> No wonder, then, that many rural people regarded the post-Soviet consolidation of land ownership into *latifundia* as robbery in broad daylight.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Land privatization in Liski, Voronezh oblast'***

Voronezh *oblast'*, an administrative region in southwest Russia that is today home to over two million people, is a useful place to examine the process and outcomes of post-Soviet land privatization, especially in light of the Stolypin-era reforms that late twentieth century liberals meant privatization to imitate. The region had seen relative success in previous iterations of land distribution. In Voronezh *guberniia*, the Stolypin reforms had offered landless and relatively land poor peasants genuine opportunities for acquiring plots. By 1914, landless peasants accounted for thirty seven percent of land purchases in the *gubernia*.<sup>20</sup> At the time, some peasants' interests had been aligned with the positions of local elites, for at the start of the twentieth century Witte Commission committee members in Voronezh seemed poised against land communes.<sup>21</sup> Some fifteen years after the Bolshevik revolution, Stalin's collectivization of agriculture in Voronezh resulted in the consolidation of land holdings and the formation of

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth C. Dunn discusses this dynamic in *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) 37. Also see Katherine Verdery, "Fuzzy Property: Rights, Power, and Identity in Transylvania's Decollectivization" in Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, eds. *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (Oxford: Roman and Littlefield, 1999) 53-82.

<sup>19</sup> Jessica Allina-Pisano, "Agrarnye reformy v Rossii i na Ukraine: sravnitel'nyi analiz," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 4:1 (March 2004).

<sup>20</sup> M.S. Simonova, "Mobilizatsiia krestianskoi nadelnoi zemli v period stolypinskoi agrarnoi reformy," in volume 5 of *Materialy po istorii sel'skogo khoziaistva i krest'ianstva SSSR* (Moscow, 1962) 458 reproduced in Martin McCauley, ed. *Octobrists to Bolsheviks: Imperial Russia 1905-1917* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984) 169.

<sup>21</sup> David Kerans, *Mind and Labor on the Farm in Black-Earth Russia, 1861-1914* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2001) 309, citing Oldenburg, *The Last Tsar* vol. 2, 19.

collective and state farms. However, by the end of the twentieth century, even as the Voronezh “Red Belt” political establishment continued to express loyalty to communist parties, and farm chairmen opposed the partition of the fields they oversaw, Voronezh had more private farmers per hectare of arable land, on average, than other Russian regions.<sup>22</sup>

Liski district, an expanse that includes some two thousand square kilometers of rolling hills and grain, sunflower, and sugar beet fields, is an hour’s drive south of the city limits of Voronezh. In Soviet times, the district was home to several successful livestock farms. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the area had been dominated by landlords and, as such, relatively well off as a whole.<sup>23</sup> Liski serves as a transportation hub in the region: a major railroad junction in the town of Liski links train lines to the south, to the city of Rostov, and west, to Ukraine. Of the fifty thousand people who live in Liski district, about one quarter work in agriculture. The vast majority of Liski residents are ethnic Russians, though the district is also home to ethnic Ukrainians, Roma, and people from the Caucasus. Rural residents in the district enjoy relatively developed infrastructure: over ninety percent of villages have gas lines, and paved roads wind through small villages as well as towns.<sup>24</sup>

During the difficult 1990s, local state officials in Liski adopted agricultural policies intended to preserve the district’s comparative advantage. The district provided assistance to large farms in obtaining credit and marketing agricultural production.<sup>25</sup> Despite intense pricing pressure to cull livestock herds, district agricultural officials enforced a strict policy of

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<sup>22</sup> Calculated from *Sel’skoe khoziaistvo Rossii 1995* (Moscow: Goskomstat, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Elvira M. Wilbur, “Peasant Poverty in Theory and Practice: A View from Russia’s ‘Impoverished Center’ at the End of the Nineteenth Century,” in Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixer, eds. *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 106.

<sup>24</sup> *Goroda i raiony Voronezhskoi oblasti* (Voronezh: Goskomstat, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Interview, head economist of “Motherland.”

maintaining livestock populations. When price scissors eventually subsided, farms in the district were positioned to reclaim their place in the regional economy as important producers of milk and meat.<sup>26</sup> Such decisions, together with a felicitous location and transportation links to urban markets, have allowed the district's relative prosperity to continue to this day.

Even as state officials in Liski were mindful of preserving the productive capacity of large farms in the district, they seemed tacitly to discourage the development of small-scale, private commercial farming, a movement that first emerged in the late 1980s based on leasing brigades within agricultural collectives. By the mid 1990s, after the period of most intense creation of private farms, Liski had allotted a smaller proportion of arable land to private farmers than any other district in Voronezh region.<sup>27</sup> Here, as elsewhere in Russia and other post-Soviet states, private farmers encountered difficulties obtaining land because “the [collective farm] chairman was against it.”<sup>28</sup> Directors of collectives could in practice, though not in law, veto allotments from the territories they managed. Farm chairmen were sometimes open in their dislike of distribution policies, noting that they “wouldn't like to hand over land.”<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, state land committees charged with overseeing reform did not use their leverage to counter collective farm chairmen's resistance to allotment of land for private farms. Chairmen also found allies in the district press, which published numerous articles critical of land privatization, advocated for buying produce locally, and positioned itself as a protector of rural interests.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Calculated from *Goroda i raiony Voronezhskoi oblasti*, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, farmer, Liskinskii raion, July 1998. Interview conducted by Mikhail Savin.

<sup>29</sup> Interview, director of kolkhoz im. Kirova.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Leonid Vybornov, “Zybkoie ravnovesie,” *Liskinskie izvestiia* 13 January 1998, 2.

Regional politicians nonetheless held Liski up as an example of successful agricultural business strategies. In 1998, on the eve of the currency crisis that brought Russian cities to the brink but temporarily boosted rural economies by dramatically decreasing the importation of food from abroad, the deputy governor of the region named Liski one of three districts that had excelled in economic reform.<sup>31</sup> Liski's relative wealth, and the improvements in agricultural production it had experienced in recent years, should have provided a fertile environment for rural worker-shareholders to benefit from ownership.

### *Resurrecting Stolypin?*

Land privatization in post-Soviet Russia transformed the ownership structure of the collective and state farms that had dominated Russian agriculture since the 1930s. During the Soviet period, land had belonged to “the people,” with the state as executor. After the fall of Soviet power, at the behest of the Russian President and a parliament deeply divided on the issue, collective and state farms were reorganized as agricultural cooperatives, joint stock companies, and other corporate forms. For most organizational forms, the land and non-land assets of each enterprise were divided on paper among individuals who currently worked on the enterprise or had retired from it within the previous twenty years. The exclusion of rural social services workers, “as if all that time they lived and worked not in the village, but on another planet,”<sup>32</sup> as well as older pensioners created social conflict and a degree of gender inequality in the process. Education and health care workers were mainly women, as were older pensioners—

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<sup>31</sup> N. Ia. Averin, at conference “Problemy sovremennogo upravlenija v APK,” Voronezh Agricultural Institute, 26-27 May 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Mikhail Nikonov. “V partiiakh i dvizheniiakh. SPS—na pul'se krest'ianskogo interesa,” *Kommuna*, 21 August 2003. [Kommuna.ru](http://Kommuna.ru).

a great number of their male counterparts had died fifty years before, as Black Earth villages met Hitler's army.

According to the specifications of post-Soviet land reform policy, the amount of land each worker-shareholder received was determined by a district norm. Remaining land became part of a district land fund, to be distributed to petitioners for land for private farms or to be used by reorganized collectives. Non-land assets were distributed according to a formula that took into account position and years of service. Members of collective farms and workers on state farms, once their enterprises had undergone this process, received documents attesting to their right to a particular amount of land—in Liski, about five hectares—on the territory of the collective in question. In theory, shareholders had a number of options: they could have their land allotted and farm it themselves; they could have it allotted and lease it to a private farmer or other enterprise; or they could lease it back to the reorganized collective. In practice, the last option was often the easiest and most sensible. The lack of developed land markets, and the high financial and social cost of removing the land from collective use, led most to continue to remain on reorganized collectives.

Under Stolypin, peasants who successfully petitioned for allotment and consolidation of land holdings avoided the periodic repartitions carried out by the peasant communes that had governed land use during the post-emancipation period. Like post-Soviet land privatization, the Stolypin-era reforms were directed at a real or imagined latent entrepreneurial class who, stifled by the inefficiencies of commune-directed land tenure arrangements, would emerge as “pioneers” in farming.<sup>33</sup> Under the commune system, households received multiple allotments

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Macey, “The Peasant Commune and the Stolypin Reforms: Peasant Attitudes, 1906-14” in Bartlett, ed. *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

that they farmed until the next repartition: in Voronezh, one in six peasants farmed more than twenty strips of land.<sup>34</sup> In principle, this arrangement allowed members of communes relatively equal access to good soil, even as it placed certain limits on farming technology and made arguably excessive demands on labor resources. The Stolypin reforms allowed peasants to consolidate and receive title to their scattered holdings. The political implications of this proposed shift were clear: allotment and consolidation of land would weaken the commune and, amidst the upheavals of early twentieth century Russia, its potential as a locus for “rebellious activities.”<sup>35</sup>

In post-Soviet Russia, converting paper rights into access to land and non-land assets was a difficult process. Allotment of land was both expensive and, often, not in the interest of the former collective. As in the case of Stolypin-era reforms,<sup>36</sup> some villagers resisted enclosure, initiating violent attacks against those participating in partition and consolidation. Meanwhile, shares in non-land assets were almost never allotted. The value of those assets—farm machinery, storage facilities, livestock sheds, and buildings—required ongoing valuation and readjustment amidst sustained hyperinflation and currency devaluation. Furthermore, shares in non-land assets were small relative to enterprise debt, and some directors threatened worker-shareholders with assessing their individual share of debt as well if they requested their share of assets.

Because membership in a community was key to access to land, contestation over membership in the collective or commune was a central feature of both processes of

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<sup>34</sup> Kerans, 322.

<sup>35</sup> Kerans, 307.

<sup>36</sup> Judith Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia 1906-1917: Peasant Responses to Stolypin's Project of Rural Transformation* (New York: Oxford, 1999).

transformation. Early twentieth century communes worried about allotting land to women and migrant workers who, due to their social position, stood to lose access to land if they did not petition for allotments.<sup>37</sup> Post-Soviet farm directors and land committees viewed the same groups through a different lens: marginal members of society had little chance of competing with larger producers and as such, posed no significant threat to the existing order. For this and other reasons, women and migrant petitioners for land were sometimes granted fields where others were refused.<sup>38</sup> The use of “dead souls,” meanwhile, appeared in attempts to claim land.<sup>39</sup> In both cases, outsiders were central to land distribution<sup>40</sup>—both in reality and in the imaginations of locals, who at the end of the century expressed their concern in an oft-repeated refrain that “we’ll be slaves on our own land.” As the Liski newspaper noted in 1992, “In places we’re threatened by expansion through the transfer of land as private property to enterprising people from the south.”<sup>41</sup>

Despite some basic similarities, both the process and the outcome of post-socialist land privatization differed from the Stolypin-era land reforms they were meant to recapitulate. Macey identifies four important distinctions between rural reforms during the first decade of the twentieth century and those at century’s end.<sup>42</sup> First, in contrast to post-Soviet reform policies, Stolypin-era land distribution occurred in a context of developed markets. Second, the earlier

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<sup>37</sup> Corinne Gaudin, “‘No Place to Lay My Head’: Marginalization and the Right to Land during the Stolypin Reforms,” *Slavic Review* 57:4 (Winter 1998), 749.

<sup>38</sup> Jessica Allina-Pisano, “Land Reform and the Social Origins of Private Farmers in Russia and Ukraine,” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 32:4 (July 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Barnes, “What’s the difference? Industrial Privatization and Agricultural Land Reform in Russia, 1990-19996,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 50:5 (1998).

<sup>40</sup> Kerans 351, Gaudin 748.

<sup>41</sup> V. Pleshkov, “Pokoi nam tol’ko snitsia,” *Liskinskie izvestiia*, 13 February 1992, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Macey 2002.

reforms involved extensive state participation and engagement at the local level. Third, Stolypin-era reforms exhibited a “pro-agricultural” rather than an urban bias.<sup>43</sup> Finally, early twentieth century land distribution was expressly intended to forestall the proletarianization of the countryside and stem the tide of urban in-migration.<sup>44</sup> On this last point, post-Soviet land distribution also was meant to safeguard social stability through the creation of a rural middle class. However, where Stolypin-era reforms may have succeeded in accomplishing this aim, post-Soviet reforms failed utterly: property rights development in contemporary Russia resulted in the creation of a rural population with few meaningful rights to land ownership beyond the household plots of their backyards.

Among historical efforts at transformation of land tenure regimes in Russia, post-socialist privatization was distinguished by the absence of a bureaucratic vanguard. Despite the strong momentum driving certain elements of post-Soviet rural reform, this “urge to mobilize”<sup>45</sup> was not supported by shock troops from the capital, such as had accompanied collectivization.<sup>46</sup> Unlike many of the land captains who were responsible for overseeing reform of rural communes in the early twentieth century,<sup>47</sup> state officials charged with carrying out privatization were local

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 183. See also Teodor Shanin, Shanin, *Russia, 1905-07: Revolution as a Moment of Truth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>45</sup> George Yaney, *The Urge to Mobilize: Agrarian Reform in Russia, 1861-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

<sup>46</sup> See Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> By the time of the Stolypin reforms, land captains were drawn from the peasant population as well as the gentry. However, in contrast to their late twentieth century counterparts, they were subject to strict supervision from higher levels of authority. See Yaney, *The Urge to Mobilize*, Ch. 4.

people with broad discretion in carrying out their duties.<sup>48</sup> Although access to state resources made them relatively privileged within their communities, the men and women who staffed district land committees, land tenure offices, and village councils lived lives embedded in local rural social networks. As a result, some rural officials held a personal interest in the outcomes of battles over land distribution. The “local engagement” of the post-Soviet era often involved obstruction, rather than promotion of reform, by those charged with its implementation. However, as some local officials discovered ways to appropriate land for themselves or their kin, they pushed ahead with privatization, using the bureaucratic channels to which they had access.

Agricultural technology also shaped the implementation of land reform during the two periods in radically different ways. For all of the social and indirect economic costs of land allotment in the Stolypin-era reforms, there was a certain sense to the incentives they offered. They presented peasants an opportunity to address the challenges of tilling narrow and scattered strips of land.<sup>49</sup> Consolidation allowed easier and more efficient use of ploughs and other tools in wider allotments. With consolidated plots, peasants could avoid potentially catastrophic losses of time incurred while traveling between strips. For mid-size farms with appropriate labor, land, and livestock ratios, the main economic drawback of consolidation—the potential loss of communal grazing rights—could be managed by tethering animals.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> This is not the same, however, as peasant participation, which Macey (2002, 192-3) views as having been central to the Stolypin reforms. Also see Jane Burbank, *Russian Peasants Go to Court: Legal Culture in the Countryside, 1905-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). This stands in stark contrast to the post-Soviet situation, in which land reforms were characterized by a lack of peasant interest or participation. Allina-Pisano, “Reorganization and its Discontents: A Case Study in Voronezh oblast” in O’Brien and Wegren, eds. *Rural Reform in Post-Soviet Russia*.

<sup>49</sup> Kerans points to the difficulty of using tools on thin strips, 328.

<sup>50</sup> Kerans, 357.

Post-Soviet land reform offered none of those potential benefits. On the contrary, the capitalized character of Soviet agriculture made land allotment a more complicated and risky enterprise than Stolypin-era consolidation. Agricultural collectives in the Black Earth grew grain, sunflower, and sugar beet in fields that stretched for hundreds or thousands of acres, with centralized irrigation systems and storage facilities. With the exception of the long, hot task of hand-thinning sugar beet, the cultivation and harvesting of industrial crops was mechanized in the late Soviet Black Earth. The use of combine harvesters and other large machinery led directors of collectives to resist land allotments from any but the most marginal fields. Otherwise, the resulting patchwork would have made the task of large-scale farming by former collectives impossible.

Hand cultivation of grain and industrial crops was inefficient and unprofitable, and growing vegetables in marginal fields required an unreasonable investment of labor and time in travel. Local state officials often demanded, therefore, that post-Soviet petitioners for agricultural land first acquire appropriate machinery. This requirement created delicate timing problems for would be farmers, for “the process was such that before, they were giving out 100 hectares, but I had no machinery. By the time I had prepared machinery, you couldn't get land.”<sup>51</sup> Such an investment was a risky proposition: applicants had no guarantee either that land would be allotted, or that it would be parceled in time for sowing that year. As one Liski farmer wondered, “Why would I have a tractor if I have no land?”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Interview, farmer.

<sup>52</sup> Interview, farmer, Liskinskii raion, July 1998.

Even those private farmers who managed to obtain land risked losing it to bankruptcy or bad health<sup>53</sup>: farmers unable to recover the cost of initial capital investments in good time could face difficulty planting or preparing their fields in subsequent years. Land zoning rules allowed district state administrations to repossess land that was not being used for its intended purpose. This situation was exacerbated, as it had been under Stolypin reforms, by limitations on or exclusion of the use of land as collateral. In Liski, as in other districts, some farmers went out of business; according to official statistics, twenty-eight private farmers were registered in the district as of January 2000.<sup>54</sup> By May of the same year, the situation had changed:

Now there are probably twelve of us. There were thirty, now there are twelve....  
It happened slowly. They melt, so to speak. They just don't survive. You need a lot of machinery, and it's hard with machinery. Machinery is expensive. You can't pay it off. But for me...I crawled out...I processed everything myself, sold my store and paid it off.<sup>55</sup>

Those farmers who had the means and luck to pay off the debts they incurred in starting their businesses encountered continual challenges in operating a farm. Even powerful private farmers—"when I stop into the bank, everyone there knows me"—were unable to obtain credit from state or private banks on reasonable terms. At the turn of the millennium, credit was issued at "fifty percent. It's highway robbery."<sup>56</sup> The state support for private farming that had

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<sup>53</sup> See "Legislation on Bankruptcy in the Russian Federation: A Special Issue," *Review of Central and East European Law* 25: 1-2 (1999).

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.liski.infobus.ru/sme.html> (accessed 2 June 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Interview with farmer.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

characterized the initial stages of privatization was withdrawn: “Before they gave us discount rates, when we were starting out...it used to be three percent, and now it’s fifty.”<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to Stolypin-era reforms, in which allotment made best economic sense for mid-size farms and households, the political economy of post-Soviet land distribution favored the wealthy or well-connected, on the one hand, and poor or marginal villagers who had nothing to lose on the other.<sup>58</sup> Poverty sometimes prevented exit from the commune, as would-be farmers encountered a multitude of economic obstacles to creating both pre-revolutionary and post-Soviet *khutora* (independent farm homesteads) or *otruby* (farming allotments).<sup>59</sup> But middling villagers also faced economic obstacles: worker-shareholders in reorganized collectives relinquished communal grazing rights for their household livestock when they allotted land, and tethering meant unmanageable labor demands and inefficient use of land.<sup>60</sup>

In post-Soviet Russia, such obstacles led farm managerial cadres to conclude that most rural people “don’t want to establish private farms” because “it’s not realistic.”<sup>61</sup> Collective farm chairmen, who had reason to avoid allowing allotments from the fields they managed, were thus able to claim more or less plausibly that only economic, not political constraints prevented worker-shareholders from leaving: “one candidate for private farmer was found on [the former

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Allina-Pisano, “Land Reform and the Social Origins of Private Farmers.” This echoes Kerans’ observation that households without livestock were one of two groups likely to favor dissolution of common grazing regimes.

<sup>59</sup> Dorothy Atkinson, *The End of the Russian Land Commune 1905-1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983) 251. Wegren et al. take the opposite tack. Finding that psychological factors (e.g. “feeling happy”) are correlated with acquisition of land, they infer that those factors determine, rather than reflect, plot expansion. Wegren et al., 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Kerans provides a useful explanation of this fundamental problem for small-holder agriculture, 333.

<sup>61</sup> Interview, head economist of “Motherland,” Liskiniskii raion, May 2000.

collective] ‘Daybreak.’ The collective farm would allot land for him tomorrow. But with his monetary share, the would-be owner can barely buy a couple hundred kilograms of cement. Knowing how much things cost in the real world, the guys in [the village of] Trinity decided to remain on “Daybreak.”<sup>62</sup>

### *Mechanisms of Dispossession*

The widespread character of dispossession in the Russian countryside is linked less to the limited creation of private farms—the post-Soviet equivalent of Stolypin-era *khutora*—than to the distribution and titling of collective and state farmland. As in so many other instances, the process of privatization itself contributed to the dispossession of workers and concentration of capital in the hands of managers. Worker-shareholders who remained on former collective and state farms gained expanded access to rented plots for household production,<sup>63</sup> but most lost other resources and opportunities for capital accumulation as commercial agricultural land was divided into shares. Even as large-scale farms continued to function as primary economic engines and social anchors in rural Russian communities, worker-shareholders lost ground, unable to take advantage of the benefits of ownership.<sup>64</sup>

The social organization of former collective farms limited worker-shareholders’ ability to benefit from ownership.<sup>65</sup> At the village and enterprise level, two sets of actors—state officials and heads of collective farms—controlled both the official distribution of land shares and the

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<sup>62</sup> V. Ivanov, “Segodnja desjatok let...igraet vsemi kraskami ‘Rassvet’” *Liskinskie izvestiia* 30 April 1992, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Wegren 2005, 159.

<sup>64</sup> Katherine Verdery finds this dynamic at work in Romania. Verdery, *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> See Caroline Humphrey *Marx Went Away—But Karl Stayed Behind* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) 445 and Allina-Pisano 2002.

conditions under which worker-shareholders could use those shares. The language that both worker-shareholders and heads of farms used to describe leasing arrangements is suggestive of the rigid hierarchical relationships that continued to characterize reorganized agricultural collectives. The verb that frequently appears in such accounts, for example, is *zabrat'*—to take away, or collect, as in, “We collected land shares from people.”<sup>66</sup>

Gender labor hierarchies likewise shaped the value of property rights for rural people. Among non-specialist worker-shareholders, machinists—who during the late Soviet period were almost exclusively men—had skills best suited for private commercial cultivation. Meanwhile, as struggling collectives outsourced livestock production to individual households, the women who staffed dairy farms took on substantial additional labor burdens with only minimal compensation.<sup>67</sup> When it came to negotiating land share lease payments, women were in a less advantageous bargaining position than their male counterparts: “Guys can work as drivers, machinists, and lathe operators. It’s worse for the girls: if she doesn’t want to go work on the [livestock] farm, she can be left without employment.”<sup>68</sup>

Managers of collectives in Liski described reorganization as having been conducted “from above,” “at the general assembly, unanimously.”<sup>69</sup> The process of reorganization did not, in itself, change the way the farm operated: “It was a *kolkhoz* before, and it remains a *kolkhoz*.” On “Quiet Don,” this was a strategic choice on the part of managers, not an unintended consequence: the form of an agricultural workers’ cooperative was chosen because it

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<sup>66</sup> Interview, head of *kolkhoz* im. Kirova.

<sup>67</sup> For example, S. Bondarev, “Kak dela, zhivotnovod. Ne khvataet dnia,” *Raionnyi vestnik* 23 July 1991, 3.

<sup>68</sup> M. Liskin, “V novykh usloviakh khoziaistvovaniia. Dokhodnyi promysel,” *Liskinskoe znanie* 30 April 1991, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Interview, director of agricultural artel “Quiet Don.”

“corresponded to the previous form.”<sup>70</sup> Likewise, the managers of “Motherland” chose a workers’ cooperative because it was “closest to a kolkhoz,”<sup>71</sup> rather than a joint-stock company, which was judged to be too expensive. There too, reorganization proceeded “unanimously” at the general assembly after the chairman had spoken: “Whatever was proposed, they chose.”<sup>72</sup>

While collective farm chairmen did not resist market reform as such, they did try to protect their own interests and the interests of the enterprises they managed. In many cases, this meant deploying bureaucratic tactics to prevent people from leaving collectives and taking their land and non-land asset shares with them. Such measures operated out of plain view, and local newspapers often reported them using vague language: “Pensioner Ivan Senchikhin told about how people tried to take their land shares from a collapsing farm and transfer it to the effectively developing agricultural cooperative ‘Liskinskii,’ but they were prohibited from doing so through administrative methods.”<sup>73</sup> In other instances, farm directors accomplished this more directly by limiting worker-shareholders’ physical access to the documents that testified to their ownership of land shares.

Administrative methods included managers’ threats to revoke social entitlements associated with membership in agricultural collectives. For rural people, this could mean expulsion into the wilderness beyond the “kolkhoz archipelago.”<sup>74</sup> Farm directors used the advantages of community membership to pressure worker-shareholders to keep their land within the enterprise’s control. For example, a resident of a village near the private farm “Rus”

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Interview, head economist of “Motherland.”

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Nikonov, “V partiiakh i dvizheniiakh.”

<sup>74</sup> Peter Lindner, “The Kolkhoz Archipelago: Localizing Privatization, Disconnecting Locales,” Agrarian Studies colloquium, Yale University, March 2004.

(formerly the agricultural collective “Daybreak”) noted that “At one time we received an apartment in the collective farm, they won’t let us privatize it, and now it’s used as a method of pressure—if you don’t like life in the village, vacate the apartment.”<sup>75</sup> Threats against access to transportation, schooling for children, and health care also were common. Some enterprise directors also used such threats to control not only use of worker-shareholder land, but also labor resources: in 1996, seven Liski families faced the choice of providing one adult worker per family to the collective farm “New World” or losing access to the water main that ran through the village.<sup>76</sup>

Such threats added to already substantial constraints on worker-shareholder mobility. By 2000, the head economist of “Motherland” reported that, “No one has taken his share. They lease them [to Motherland], but the contract conditions are unfeasible.”<sup>77</sup> Without cash to pay for allotting land, many worker-shareholders had no practical choice but to lease their shares to reorganized collectives. This was especially the case in districts with few powerful private farmers who might “work it out with the pensioners, with the grandmas, because they all have five hectares of land each.”<sup>78</sup> This was not due to a lack of desire to allot land, as in a neighboring district, where “there are more and more people who would like to leave the former collective with their land share,”<sup>79</sup> but rather due to a structural inability to do so. Despite

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<sup>75</sup> Nikonov, “V partiiakh i dvizheniakh.”

<sup>76</sup> Tat’iana Zenina, “‘Kollektivizatsiia’ po-ermolovski: ne idesh’ v kolkhoz—otrezhem vody,” *Liskinskie izvestiia* 27 August 1996, 1. The villagers also were given the choice of paying 700,000 rubles per month for water. With salaries in the 100,000 ruble range, such an “option” was clearly impossible to exercise.

<sup>77</sup> Interview, head economist of “Motherland.”

<sup>78</sup> Interview, farmer.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with farmer Maria Nikolaevna Kur’ianova, “Est’ u nas takie fermery. Dat’ uma zemle neprosto, esli netu sredstv dlia rosta,” *Verkhnekhavskie rybezhi* 24 December 1998, 3.

Liski's relatively advantageous location with respect to transportation and industry, there were few alternatives to leasing land to the former collective. With no private farms nearby, "People have nowhere else to go."<sup>80</sup>

### *Wages of Ownership*

If social control played an important role in shaping worker-shareholders' access to the benefits of ownership, low lease payments for land shares also limited rural people's opportunities for capital accumulation at critical periods during the process of privatization. In addition to the formal monopsony that characterized land share markets in areas without strong private farmers, worker-shareholders faced other obstacles in extracting value from land share ownership. Many farm directors did not sign leasing contracts with worker-shareholders; those who did sometimes withheld them from shareholders' view, locking them in the safe in their office.<sup>81</sup> Lease payments were symbolic, often a few sacks of grain at harvest time. In 2003, the Voronezh regional newspaper observed that, "Last year for the first time in ten years they distributed two hundred kilograms of grain, five liters of vegetable oil and fifteen kilograms of sugar for each share."<sup>82</sup> The value of even such a windfall could do little to feed a family for the year—two hundred kilograms of grain was worth at most 600 rubles at the time, about ten days' pay for one person.<sup>83</sup> In Liski, the situation had become so dire by the following year that district council found it necessary to issue a recommendation on the value of land rents. According to the recommendation, for each share, the leaser should provide 500 kilograms of

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<sup>80</sup> Interview, head economist of "Motherland."

<sup>81</sup> Nikonov, "V partiiakh i dvizheniiakh."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Aleksandr Marochin, "Pochemu v Voronezhe podorozhal khleb?" *Komsomol'skaia Pravda v chernozem'e* 5 February 2004.

grain, fifteen kilograms of oil, fifteen kilograms of sugar, free plowing of household plots, and “household” and funerary services.<sup>84</sup>

The low value of rents as well as other aspects of rural land privatization separated control of the means of production from labor relations and incentives. During the late Soviet period, members of collective farms had received not only remuneration for labor, but also entitlements based on community membership. Payment was thus linked, in part, to members’ legally underspecified but socially constituted stake in the health of the collective farm. The conditions surrounding land privatization changed aspects of this relationship, subtly decoupling worker-shareholders’ role as laborers from their role as owners. This was precisely the opposite of what reformers had intended. As in Stolypin-era reform, land ownership was meant to improve stewardship and to strengthen the link between the land and its tillers. The Stolypin reforms produced a similar paradox: then, those most likely to participate in allotment were those who intended to sell, not improve the land.<sup>85</sup>

Many agricultural enterprises calculated land rents based on production levels.<sup>86</sup> As one farm director described it, “We work according to contracts. If we have a harvest, you’ll receive [what is specified in the contract], if not, you won’t get anything.”<sup>87</sup> This choice reflected the belief that ownership would improve labor incentives by giving rural people a stake in the productivity of former collectives. However, in most cases this arrangement instead held rural people hostage to economic conditions they could not control.

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<sup>84</sup> Kardashov, “Raionnye budni. ‘Glavnoe dlia nas—eto stabil’nost’” *Kommuna*, 22 June 2004. Kommuna.ru.

<sup>85</sup> Kerans, 352.

<sup>86</sup> Tatiana Kovaleva, “Skol’ko poluchaet vladelets zemel’noi doli? Na Kubani proveli analiz...” *Krest’ianskie vedomosti* 12 April 2004.

<sup>87</sup> Interview, head of “Davydovskoe.”

Agricultural enterprises in Russia faced enormous economic and logistical challenges during the 1990s and into the new millennium. Contrary to prevailing beliefs, most of these challenges were not linked to the quality or intensity of labor. During the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods, former collective and state farms did face unstable labor cadres—“people come and go”—and machinists were perennially in short supply.<sup>88</sup> However, did market reforms did not address or resolve the supply chain problems that had plagued agriculture during the 1980s.<sup>89</sup> High oil prices exacerbated the problem, leading farm managers to lament that, “before, you didn't have to kill yourself trying to figure out where to get diesel.”<sup>90</sup> Because of serious difficulties in locating steady supplies of agricultural inputs, it was “impossible to establish a reserve,”<sup>91</sup> and enterprises could find themselves without key machine parts, storage materials, or fuel at critical times during the growing season. No matter how hard worker-shareholders were willing to work in order to improve production, structural constraints limited enterprise profits.

Farm profits also were limited by reliance on middlemen who set their fees according to a proportion of the harvest, rather than a volume of goods or a cash amount. Middlemen handled plowing, harvesting, and crop storage. During the post-Soviet period, they asked up to thirty percent of the harvest for any one of these services. Some agricultural middlemen acquired their assets at fire sale auction prices during the early 1990s: as well-placed individuals purchased industrial enterprises at auction for a fraction of their market value, “the reform started, the buy-

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<sup>88</sup> Interview, machinist of “Zarya.”

<sup>89</sup> Allina-Pisano 2002, Macey 1994.

<sup>90</sup> Interview, machinist of “Zarya.”

<sup>91</sup> Interview, district deputy head of agricultural management.

up, including of agricultural machinery. They bought up shares of stock for almost nothing.”<sup>92</sup> In Liski, the primary provider of machinery was the RTP (Repair and Machinery Enterprise)—a company whose controlling shares were held by a Moscow industrial bank. It serviced all large agricultural enterprises in the district, as well as private farms. Because the Liski RTP worked with all major agricultural enterprises in the district, it was a significant buyer and thus shaped local prices. Contracts with the Liski RTP were paid half in cash and half in harvest—or in metal, electricity, or gas.<sup>93</sup> Harvest payments were priced upon delivery, rather than at the time of contract,<sup>94</sup> and at the height of the harvest season, prices were at their lowest. Agricultural enterprises without adequate crop storage facilities were compelled either to sell a substantial portion of their harvest immediately at low prices, or to pay for storage until prices increased—in which case they risked spoilage, pest contamination, or mixture with lower-quality grain.

Farms in Liski, like farms throughout Russia, faced additional heavy financial obligations in taking on the burden of social service provision to pensioners, who were less likely than others to have the money for land share allotment. In 2000, the director of “Quiet Don” put it this way: “There are very many pensioners. We can’t do what we want because we have to service them. Of 1,200 people, only 340 are workers. The rest are pensioners.”<sup>95</sup> On nearby “Motherland,” 260 workers maintained an enterprise that served 400 pensioners.<sup>96</sup> Like the members of Stolypin-era land communes who worried that those who sold their land allotments could

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<sup>92</sup> Interview, machinist of “Zarya.”

<sup>93</sup> Interview, director of RTP.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Interview, director of agricultural artel “Quiet Don.”

<sup>96</sup> Interview, head economist of “Motherland.”

become a “burden to the commune,”<sup>97</sup> directors of enterprises had not only to run the business, but also to provide for less able members of the community. Post-Soviet agricultural enterprises were released from state control into an economic environment that could sink even strong firms, just as local state institutions externalized costs by *de facto* leaving social service provision to those firms.<sup>98</sup> Farm directors handled this problem by subtracting the cost of services from land rents—hence the Liski district council’s explicit recommendation of “household” and funerary services as part of leasing arrangements.

The low value of land rents meant not only that land shareholders did not gain from ownership, but also, as other elements of institutional reform proceeded, they also lost through taxation. Post-Soviet land tax requirements may bear greater resemblance to Russian post-emancipation land tenure arrangements than to Stolypin-era reforms in the burden they placed upon rural people: emancipation required peasant households not only to accept shares in communal land but also to pay the taxes imposed upon those shares.<sup>99</sup> Under privatization, the deputy head of the Liski land committee described rural peoples’ “great unwillingness” to accept land share documents during the mid-1990s.<sup>100</sup> When some rural people resisted participation in post-Soviet land share distribution, their motivation was likely not ideological. Rather than demonstrating culturally based antipathy toward the market, as some commentators have suggested, members of collective farms simply may have been wary of the financial obligations

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<sup>97</sup> Gaudin 1998, 752

<sup>98</sup> This pooled risk across a relatively small group of people, increasing the burden on individuals within enterprises. If, in liberal capitalist economies, such arrangements may result in “islands of security within the economy with high waters all around,” such islands were often quickly inundated in post-Soviet Russia. See Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America’s Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003) 257.

<sup>99</sup> Atkinson 1983, 26.

<sup>100</sup> Interview, deputy head of district land committee.

that nominal ownership would eventually impose upon them, for “a great deal became clear when the ‘trap’ worked and land taxes sharply increased.”<sup>101</sup>

Some worker shareholders responded to increased tax burdens by attempting to extricate themselves from ownership relations. However, this proved costly both in the direct financial sense and, in some cases, in terms of the social relationships that sustain informal economic life. The sale or gift of a land share required expensive cadastral work that alone could cost a pensioner half of her monthly income. For people living paycheck to paycheck, this constituted an overwhelming burden that did nothing to improve future income. Rather, it merely staved off total ruin: “Tax debts are growing. ‘Law experts’ arrive from the district center and warn: if you don’t pay taxes or properly register your refusal [of land] we’ll inventory your property...they can take away your house and...resettle you in a dormitory.”<sup>102</sup>

### ***Payment for Labor***

Worker-shareholders in Liski, elsewhere in Voronezh, and across Russia found themselves in a predicament: land privatization should have conferred benefits of ownership that would improve labor productivity and allow them to achieve a middle class life. The main mechanisms of capital accumulation available to them, however, turned out to be household production and labor on reorganized former collectives. The latter was a necessary support for the former: wages from work on the collective, whether in cash or in kind, helped sustain household production.<sup>103</sup> Worker-shareholders took the feed grain, young animals, hay,

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<sup>101</sup> Eduard Efremov, “Zemel’nyi vopros. Bezzakonie... v zakone?” *Kommuna*, 17 March 2006.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Gavin Kitching, “The Revenge of the Peasant? The Collapse of Large-Scale Russian Agriculture and the Role of the Peasant ‘Private Plot’ in That Collapse, 1991–97,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 26:1 (1998).

construction materials, salt, sugar, and other commodities they received through their association with former collectives and used them as inputs for their gardens and livestock husbandry. Some managed household production successfully and produced a meaningful marketable surplus. Others fell into or remained in poverty, due in part to the problem of wage arrears after privatization.

The relative success of large agricultural enterprises in Liski during the post-Soviet period did not protect worker-shareholders from continual delays in receiving their wages. Some directors raised livestock workers' salaries in order to compete more effectively in a thin labor pool,<sup>104</sup> and one farm director claimed to have offered an advance to milkmaids, paying them monthly and in cash in order to raise productivity.<sup>105</sup> However, most worker-shareholders did not receive regular payment for their work. In Liski, five years into the period of liberalizing economic reforms, a nine month delay in distribution of wages on state farm Kolybel'skii led milkmaids to slow production,<sup>106</sup> while livestock workers on the Petropavlovskii collective farm refused to feed or milk cows in protest of unpaid wages.<sup>107</sup> The situation escalated to the point of open conflict by December 1998, when the milkmaids of the "40 years of October" collective farm "literally assaulted" its head, threatening to stop milking the cows if he did not release their wages for October and November.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> V. Kolodezhanskii, "Khoteli kak luchshe. Poluchilos'...kak nikogda!" *Liskinskie izvestiia* 4 April 1996, 2.

<sup>105</sup> Interview, director of agricultural artel "Quiet Don."

<sup>106</sup> G. Aleksandrov, "S chego zakrugliaetsia 'Rodina'. O kakom moloke govorit', esli doiarki s sentiabria bez zarplaty," *Liskinskie izvestiia* 10 June 1997, 2.

<sup>107</sup> Aleksei Salchikov, "Kar'era pervoi v raione zhenshchiny-predsedatelia rukhnula. Kto ostanovit razval v 'Petropavlovskom'?" *Liskinskie izvestiia* 23 January 1997, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Leonid Vybornov, "Zybkoie ravnovesie," *Liskinskie izvestiia* 13 January 1998, 2.

Even after wage arrears had been addressed in Russia's industrial sector, agricultural enterprises continued to withhold wages from worker-shareholders. In a nearby district, a private farmer later commented that, "With every year the situation on the agricultural enterprises becomes more troubled. In places people haven't seen their salaries for years."<sup>109</sup> Even in Liski, where workers were paid more on average than nearly any other district in Voronezh, the situation only worsened over time.<sup>110</sup> In May 2000, even strong enterprises were withholding wages for three months,<sup>111</sup> and other large agricultural enterprises in Liski had not paid their workers for six to seven months.<sup>112</sup> As the head economist for "Homeland" described the situation at the time, "There's no salary, no incentive."<sup>113</sup> By the summer of 2003, wage arrears had skyrocketed. Agricultural production in Liski had increased, but enterprises in the district had an outstanding wage bill of over 446 million rubles,<sup>114</sup> and the average Liski worker-shareholder had not received payment for her labor in well over a year.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> "Est' u nas takie fermery."

<sup>110</sup> *Pokozateli ekonomicheskogo i sotsial'nogo razvitiia gorodov i raionov Voronezhskoi oblasti* (Voronezh: Goskomstat, 2003) 35.

<sup>111</sup> Interview, head of "Davydovskoe."

<sup>112</sup> Interview, head economist of "Motherland" and interview, farmer.

<sup>113</sup> Interview, head economist of "Motherland."

<sup>114</sup> Aleksandr Iagodkin, "Vzgliad na doklad ministra iz Voronezha. U kogo chto vyroslo i komu pora obrezat" *Novaia gazeta*, 9 February 2004. Novayagazeta.ru

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. Agricultural workers in the district made, on average, 1563 rubles a month that year. The official Liski administration website reports that the district was home to 8,319 agricultural workers in 2000 <http://www.liski.infobus.ru/agriculture.html> (accessed 29 May 2006). This number has declined each year (in 1999-2000 for example, the agricultural labor force decreased by four percent).

Changes in statistical reporting practices after 2002 led to a different picture, but the underlying reality did not appear to have changed. By 2004, the situation would seem to have improved, with wages for agricultural workers in Liski rising to 2440 rubles—430 rubles more than the regional average. However, inflation outpaced wages during the same period.

On one of the healthiest farms in the district, where worker-shareholders received up to sixty percent of their wages in cash, worker-shareholders' constrained mobility in the face of weakened public transportation infrastructure limited how they could spend their wages. The director of "Davydovksoe" explained how wages were paid:

If there's a harvest, I can sell it if they want. I'll give out the money...they'll go...anyway to shop at the market or somewhere. On the *kolkhoz* we have meat and so on...whatever we have, they get from the *kolkhoz*. So it's not a problem because they're going to buy it anyway. Here we just write off the salary and that's it.<sup>116</sup>

For worker-shareholders, part of the potential problem lay in how those prices were computed. The arrangement saved workers transportation and time costs, but it brought other limitations. First, workers were compelled by force of circumstance to accept whatever price the farm's accountant decided to use, and second, individual workers' social status could shape access to particular commodities.<sup>117</sup>

Worker-shareholders recuperated some proportion of unpaid wages in pilfering and "pan-toting," but it is not possible to state with any accuracy to what extent, and among what communities, this was the case. Notwithstanding such attempts at compensating for wage arrears, delays in payment for labor posed multiple problems for worker-shareholders and acted as an obstacle for capital accumulation—itsself a necessary condition for land acquisition. Worker-shareholders who faced wage arrears during times of inflation suffered particularly, as they saw their "savings" plummet in value, unable to redeem them for durable goods.

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<sup>116</sup> Interview, head of "Davydovskoe."

<sup>117</sup> Field notes in nearby district, August 1998.

In periods of acute social conflict, such as the currency crisis and subsequent political reshuffling of August 1998, rural people were more insulated from food shortages than their urban counterparts. However, they were more vulnerable than usual to difficulties in obtaining goods for which they normally paid cash, as people from urban areas swept villages in search of reserves of oil, salt, matches, soap, and other staples.<sup>118</sup> In such situations, a lack of immediate access to cash could translate into an inability to convert household production into storable food for winter or market. Finally, the seasonal nature of agricultural work, including household production, meant that delays in allocation of either cash or in-kind payments could place worker-shareholders and their families at risk, unable to plow or sow their garden plots on time, or at a loss as to how to predict whether fattening animals for market for a period of months would result in a net loss or gain for the household.

### ***Conclusion***

The land privatization programs implemented across Russia in the years following the Soviet collapse, though modeled on early twentieth century land reform, produced results that were more problematic for rural people than even the most critical accounts suggest Stolypin's efforts had been. Ownership did not give post-Soviet rural people access to mechanisms of capital accumulation or reproduction—rather, it resulted in dispossession. Most rural people who have managed to raise their standard of living, or even to prosper, have done so without the benefits legal land ownership was meant to provide.

The changes of the 1990s and early twenty-first century will limit many households' future prospects for acquiring land. Like Petr Arkadeevich Stolypin, Russian economic liberals

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

viewed enclosure as a way to foster rural households' independence, encouraging economic development and liberating people from social control. Instead, privatization led to the entrenchment of managerial control on former collectives. Today, rural people live in world in which their paymasters also govern their access to housing, health care, schooling for their children, and finally, the federal ballot box. Only elections for farm directors—a holdover from the Soviet era—enable some villagers to find a degree of autonomy for themselves, as in one former collective in Liski, where “the administration didn't want a woman to be the chairman since it's a complex farm, but people insisted and elected her.”<sup>119</sup>

If Stolypin first served as a reference point for land reform in post-Soviet Russia, he continues to figure prominently in discussions of contemporary Russian politics. But fifteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union, he is no longer an exemplar for economic reform. Rather, his other incarnation, as an arbiter of a stern political order, has come to dominate national political discourse. Historiographical battles over Stolypin, in which he is alternately portrayed as an autocrat or liberal, as destroyer of vibrant peasant communities or liberator of entrepreneurial-minded rural people, suggest either vastly divergent interpretations or a man, as a recent biographer suggests,<sup>120</sup> of divergent character. However, that apparent divergence, like the behavior of farm managers who at once adapted to markets and stood in the way of workers' rights, is fully compatible with a market order. In post-Soviet Russia, the emergence of consolidated managerial power and dispossession should be no surprise: under enclosure policies that exclude the active participation of those who will be most affected by reform, authoritarian politics and liberal economics will go hand in hand.

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<sup>119</sup> Interview, machinist of “Zarya,” 18 May 2000.

<sup>120</sup> Abraham Ascher, *P. A. Stolypin: The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).