

Chapter 10

Agrarian Reforms of the 20th Century in Russia: Impacts on Agricultural Sector and Food Security

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ABSTRACT

Current political and economic reforms, as well as the development of market relations and private property rights, need a retrospect to the experience of the past. An ambitious reform implemented by Russian public entities in the early 20th century was a result of a compromise between the government, society, and individuals. The goals of the reforms offered by Pyotr Stolypin were similar to those of the contemporary ones. Stolypin's reforms aimed at the substitution of group type of land use by public property. The reforms were not evolutionary but were motivated by the explosive political and social-economic situation. Another agrarian reform took place in the early 1990s in the Soviet bloc, including the USSR. It aimed at state land property and a centrally planned agrarian economy, the domination of big manufacturers like collective and communal farms, and state pricing control. Despite similar basic principles, the states chose different strategies for the implementation of agrarian reforms.

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INTRODUCTION

In modern conditions of political and economic transformations and development of market relations and property rights, studying previous experience acquires particular importance. Reforms are important and momentous events in the history of any country as they stipulate national development strategies for many years. From a scientific point of view, reform is a reorganization of any aspect of social life without destroying the foundations of its social structure (History of Russia, n.d.). In agriculture, it is meant to be a complex of measures undertaken by a state in order to redistribute land ownership and increase production efficiency.

In the history of many countries, reforms were carried out for the benefits of upper-class' interests without consideration of common people. Such reforms gave rise to protracted conflicts, transformed the structure and efficiency of national economies, dramatically changed the ways of life of many people.

In this regard, it is important to study both achievements and failures of reforms not only from the point of view of the public good but also the interests of individuals. The history of the Soviet Union (USSR) and modern Russia provides extensive material for such a study from the reforms of Petr Stolypin to current agrarian transformations. In the majority of previous studies, the analysis has been carried out from a unified position, critical discussion is lacking. Most of the publications cover only particular aspects of agrarian reforms, such as law, economics, land management, agricultural production, and social sphere. Statistic data allowing to evaluate the progress and effectiveness of agrarian reforms is heterogeneous and difficult to compare. There are complications in the form of well-defined ideological approaches regarding strategies and means of conducting reforms in the early and mid-XX century. The examples are the theses about the need for an exclusively revolutionary way of conducting reforms in Russia or about the advantages of small farms over large ones.

Development of agricultural sector in the countries of the former USSR represents the unique historical experience. It started from similar positions but used different strategies and after 25 years came to different results. A comparison of the experience of 15 countries makes it possible to identify both general patterns and national (regional) features. Such reviews are now missing in the literature.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the strategies, course, and effectiveness of major agrarian reforms in Russia in XX century on the basis of common approaches. To achieve this goal, the authors attempt describing the reasons of agrarian reforms; revealing similarities and differences in carrying out reforms in different time periods and different territories of the USSR; analyzing the effects and major consequences of reforms.

BACKGROUND

A large-scale agrarian reform started in Russia in the beginning of XX century based on a compromise between the government and public society. Its goal was to increase manufacturing of high-quality products and minimize living and materialized labor, as well as reduce damage to the environment. To achieve the goal, the following tasks were supposed to be accomplished:

- Radical change in land relations
- Improvement of the organization of production and ensuring stable agricultural production
- Development of optimal conditions for life and work of rural population

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