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## Fox among the lambs

A polemic, such as would be condemned by some feminists as 'gladiatorial', has been published in the Fall 1988 issue of *Academic Questions*, an organ of the National Academy of Scholars, Princeton. Robin Fox accuses the American Anthropological Association, normally thought of as epitomizing a generous liberalism, of conducting an *auto-da-fé* against those scientists like himself who are interested in the possible biological basis of human aggression. It did this, according to Professor Fox, by adopting the Seville Declaration on Violence' at its 1986 annual business meeting, and then endorsing it by 1,699 postal votes in favour and 230 against out of about 8,500 ballots sent—which Fox thinks could mean that many of the members are not too keen on the declaration but don't want to be out of line. Fox takes as his cue that Seville was the centre of the Inquisition.

For Fox, 'the prospect of being at the mercy of human intelligence and culture, given its record, is far more frightening than being at the mercy of "aggressive instincts", which I think I understand... Our worst enemy is fanaticism (xenophobic or ideological or both)', especially because we can rationalize and routinize it. He criticizes the propositions in the declaration as banal or in some cases misleading (for instance, the allegation that unnamed scientists 'justify' war, and the failure to mention that one of the instances of 'destructive intraspecies fighting between organized groups' is found among our nearest genetic relatives, the chimpanzees), and as implicitly hostile to the free development of science.

The motivation of the Seville Declaration can be traced back to the founding of Unesco after World War 2, and to the disquiet provoked in many thoughtful observers by the writings of Desmond Morris, Ardrey, Lorenz, C.D. Darlington and a number of others. Somewhere around 1970 the term 'biologism' was coined, and we still need to be reminded to be on our guard when biology is used to buttress positions more properly expressed in social and political terms, for it combines the high prestige of the natural sciences with the social sciences' high potential for unconscious bias. Popular writers like Paul Johnson still make use of concepts drawn from human biology to support political arguments, usually of an illiberal bent, and they need to be challenged by informed experts.

It is true that some of the British and American rightists who reject the notion of social justice do reveal assumptions which are reminiscent of Victorian social darwinism. But the really influential exponents of conservative thinking—whether Enoch Powell, Roger Scruton or Margaret Thatcher herself, or various American revivalists of the 'culture of poverty' thesis—have little or no recourse to biologism.

The Seville Declaration is surely in truth rather off-beam, especially as regards the 'bondage of biological pessimism'. (It might have been more timely before World War 1, when General von Bernhardi, one of the leading theorists of Pan-Germanism, wrote of the 'biological necessity' of war.) As Fox observes, 'first, scientific findings on the innate components of aggression are very recent, but wars have existed throughout human history; and second, there is no evidence that current "pessimism" about the inevitability of war stems from the biological studies in question'. Arthur Koestler, though not blameless himself of biologism on other occasions, once wrote succinctly that the trouble with our species is not aggression but devotion.

To put the point more mildly than Fox, bodies such

indicated that the enshrinement of the late Emperor's spirit had taken place.<sup>3</sup>

The recent funeral of Emperor Shôwa may well show us a similar pattern of continuity and innovation. Again, might not the beliefs and meanings attached to the funeral be also a mixture of old and new and, if so,

what are these and what is their place in the very different social and political conditions under which imperial ceremonies take place in contemporary Japan? Whatever the position, it is surely necessary to consider modern as well as ancient precedents, data which this article has sought to provide. □

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# Perestroika and the pastoralists

## *The example of Mongun-Taiga in Tuva ASSR*

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### CAROLINE HUMPHREY

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This summer and autumn I made two visits to Tuva as advisor for an ethnographic documentary.<sup>1</sup> Tuva is remote, on the western border of Mongolia, and it only entered the Soviet Union in 1944. It is still difficult to get to, and not just for Westerners: there is no railway, the road crosses a high mountain pass which is snowy even in midsummer, and plane tickets, unless booked months in advance, are obtainable only on a who-you-know basis. With its party leadership recently castigated in *Pravda* for maintaining a backward economy heavily in debt to Moscow, Tuva might seem the last place to look for advanced implementation of *perestroika*. Actually, the reforms are happening, and the difficulties which beset them are not so much due to Tuva's isolation or cultural peculiarities as to pervasive all-Union economic structures and endemic mistrust.

I hoped to see economic results in the capital, Kyzyl, as it is the centre of an agricultural region. The town was a Russian hamlet, re-named after the revolution in 1921, and built up from the 1940s onwards. Now its population of 70,000 is about one third Tuvianian and two-thirds Russian. The Tuvianians are descendants of Turkic-speaking tribes, natives of the region for at least a thousand years, with varied hunting, agricultural, pastoralist economies, patrilineal localized clans, and shamanist cultures, in some places thinly overlaid with Buddhism. For centuries Tuva was part of the Manchu Empire. But none of this is apparent in Kyzyl. Its small ministries, police headquarters, clinics, etc. are to be found in Chekhovian villas, whose porticos and verandas can be seen behind curtains of leaves, the result of devoted tree-planting by Russian settlers. Dusty wooden suburbs lie beyond. In the centre is the main square, with Party headquarters on one side, the Soviet building facing it. The statue of Lenin, the post-office and a gigantic new theatre make up the standard whole.

Where are the results of the economic reforms, the burgeoning enterprise, to be seen? *Where* a society places things is indicative of its values. The central square is huge, though not as vast as the windswept equivalent in Ulan-Bator where in certain weather conditions it is barely possible to see the other side, but it is clearly sacrosanct. A monumental slab, which must have born many slogans in its time, tells people of the necessity of *perestroika* [*illus.*, page 8]. With the old guard still in place here, despite *Pravda*, the changing balance of power between the Party and the Soviets envisaged by Gorbachev is something of a mystery.

The results of the economic reforms so far have a temporary, inconsequential feel in Kyzyl. The market is not full of local producers selling basic products to eager buyers. It is a muddy compound down a side-street, many of its booths empty. The sellers are mostly elderly, sitting patiently by small piles of astronomi-

cally expensive apples or berries, salted cucumbers, knitted hats, or vaguely ethnic (but certainly not Tuvianian) children's clothes. A Russian with a large reference volume sells bundles of grey medicinal herbs. Another has just one item for sale, a pair of hairy boots made from dog skin. The only commercially active moment I saw in several visits was when some Tuvianian lads drove in a lorry from which they sold meat, butchered on the spot.

There was a town festival during our visit and on this occasion there were some lorries displaying home-made nick-nacks and one or two Armenians appeared selling pork shashlyks on street-corners. None did a roaring trade and by afternoon it was as though they had never been there. Tuvianians generally do not like pork nor roasted meat and the opinion seemed to be that the shashlyks were expensive and insanitary. The lack of interest was not because the capital is well-supplied. On the contrary, meat is rationed to one kilo per person per month, as are some other basic products such as sugar and butter. So what is going wrong? Part of the answer can be seen from the progress of the reforms in the rural meat-producing region which is where we made our film.

We stayed in Mongun-Taiga district, where two livestock state farms provide virtually all employment. The population is entirely Tuvianian. This is a bare windswept land, suitable for yaks and hardy sheep, where the herders live in yurts and move several times during the year. At issue is the effect of the reforms on pastoralists, in both the USSR and Mongolia,<sup>2</sup> but it will be evident that many of the problems apply to rural society in general.

The reforms were explained to farmers during 1986 and made law in January 1987. The major innovation is the 'contract team' (*podryad*). This is intended to replace the old system of production by monolithic collective and state farms. The aim is to provide a framework for work groups of various sizes, which will correspond to the optimum types of cooperation for given tasks. At the same time, the replacement of orders from above by a contract is intended to give the team more independence and initiative. The second major reform, at least as far as Tuva is concerned, is the abolition of all limits to the private ownership of livestock. A third reform, the creation of a single administrative hierarchy for agriculture in place of various ministerial departments (at district level known as the RAPO), is, as far as I can tell, experienced as old wine in new bottles and will not be further discussed here.

Legally, the forms of organization are the same all over the USSR. There are contract teams of the following kinds: lease, brigade, family, and individual. In the

Herdsmen at a brigade meeting to confirm winter pastures.  
All photos by Caroline Humphrey.



Mogen-Buren state farm I visited there were no lease or individual *podryady* and only a few brigade teams. The reforms had been implemented mainly by putting herders into family contracts (*semeinyi podryad*). One official claimed that all of the herders had taken out such contracts, but a shepherd said that only about 50% have really done so. This confusion is typical of the situation in which farms are accused of setting up 'on paper' *podryady* in order to comply with the decree.

The lease contract (*arendnyi podryad*) is considered the most advanced form. It works in theory as follows. Groups of different sizes, families and individuals can enter such a contract. Land and the basic means of production are leased to the team by a farm for up to fifty years for an agreed payment in money or in kind. The payment is assessed as the difference between the value of planned production from that land and the costs of production.<sup>3</sup> The team should sell all of the planned product to the farm at set prices, and anything produced over this can be disposed of as they like. The lessee is entirely responsible for the solvency of the *podryad*, cushioned only by insurance payments made on top of the 'rent'. It is because both the leasing organization and the lessee are on full self-financing (*khozraschet*) that this form is considered the most progressive.

Why has this system not penetrated to the pastoralist farm at Mogen-Buren? After all it gives the producer long-term control, enables him to make investments and improvements, and reduces dependence on the farm to a minimum. All of this should contribute to the 'feeling of mastery' (*chustvo khozyaina*) which Soviet rural sociologists identify as a key to the regeneration of rural life.

There is a practical problem with the lease contract in the pastoral context, which is that herdsmen range over the pastures and may change them from year to year. The notion of ownership of specific tracts of pasture has always been foreign to them, though animals were owned privately. This problem could be solved, however, by leasing out the right to use variable routes. The hindrances to the new system seem petty, but they are enough to prevent it from taking root.

For example, with a lease contract the herder would spend most of the year living in his own yurt, but he would pay rent for the house used at winter camp. Such houses are worth thousands of rubles. The shepherds *not* on a lease contract get them free from the farm, so

unless everyone goes over to the *arendnyi podryad* the herders who do feel they are at a disadvantage. Some people say they would be happy to live in yurts all year round, but the farm authorities find this unacceptable.<sup>4</sup>

A more serious objection was raised by a shepherd from Erziz district in Tuva. 'I would have gone onto a lease contract. But not just with one flock. I'd like to take two or three. I've got two sons. I myself could take a flock of ewes, the older son could take the lambs, and the younger one could take the castrated rams. And we'd have no troubles because that way everything would be in our hands. But how is it now? I'd give in my used-up flock and take in some new young ewes. It's like buying a cat in a bag. But you have to take them, you know they won't give you any others. Though you can see they are a different colour and scraggy. They won't last through the winter by themselves, so how can you think about good lambing? Give me the chance of choosing my animals myself—that's all I need'.<sup>5</sup> In other words, even the lease contract at present does not give the shepherd control of the full process of production. One element, one kind of flock, is not enough. There is no reason why the lease contract should not be available to a family group as the shepherd suggests, but so far this is not one of the permitted variants in his region.

The forms which have been taken up are the brigade contract and the family contract. The *brigadnyi podryad* is used for short-term tasks, such as hay-cutting or construction. In, say, hay-cutting, the group makes a contract whereby it gets a specific bit of land, transport and tools from the farm, and it agrees to sell a planned amount of hay to the farm at a set price. The farm may give a small advance to cover current expenses. The group elects its own brigadier and makes its own distribution of the proceeds according to the work put in by each member.

In fact this kind of contract can be the old brigade renamed. The problem here is again the coordination of the team with other parts of the farm. For example, a milking *podryad* may not be supplied with enough fodder and yet it now stands to lose money if the milk yield begins to fall. To counter this disincentive a farm will pay minimum wages as an 'advance' on earning from sales. These wages need not be paid back even if the sales do not cover them, and as a result the reform begins to look very much like the old system. With

A dynamic young official of the new perestroika type, responsible for agriculture, including herding, in Mugur-Aksy, capital of Mongun-Taiga district.



guaranteed wages the workers can get away with slacking, and the Party feels it must intervene, for example by insisting that records are kept of attendance. This is in fact illegal—members of a *podryad* have the right to organize their own work—but one can see how the logic of the situation, as well as old habits, encourage it.

The herders experience the reforms as a combination of the family contract with the lifting of the limit on private livestock. The cosy-sounding family contract is in fact highly complex and bureaucratic. A family with, say, two or three working members, appoints one as the leader, who is financially responsible. The team agrees to sell a given amount of lambs, milk, wool, etc. to the farm at set prices, and through the year receives generous wages (200-300 rubles a month, when the Soviet average is 200) as an advance on sales. The farm contracts to provide 'straight expenses' (fodder, water, salt, transport, building materials, kerosene, veterinary medicines, etc.) at given rates, and it provides 'indirect expenses' (pasture, housing, pens, a horse) free of charge. The effect of all this is that the team has two accounts (*fondy*) held for it at the farm office: one detailing the agreed straight expenses and the extent the team has used them up, and the other being a wages account, the amount to be earned when the contracted products are sold to the farm. If the team economizes on straight expenses 75% of the saved value is paid into the wages account. But if the team overspends on straight expenses 100% of the cost is taken off wages. When the team produces more than the contract states it is paid at generous bonus prices. But when it loses animals, or produces less than agreed, the shortfall must be made up from the private herds.

A stupendous amount of book-keeping is the result. The leader must calculate each cost, e.g. getting his wool to the state farm centre at 13 kopecks per kilometre, and know whether an extra run will take him over the limit. Expenses are added up each month and paid by cheque via a bank at the farm centre (a new idea which the officials claim the herders do not understand). In practice, most people leave all this to the brigadier. He goes to the bank for the shepherds, keeps the books, distributes the wages, keeps tally of the state and private flocks, allocates the pastures, and generally, if he has lost the right directly to boss people around,

he now has at least as much informal power.

The system is not easy for farm officials either. They must calculate what will be economic prices for a myriad of items in a changing situation. Basically, the savings to the farm on the 'direct expenses', which were provided free in the old system, must be enough to cover the cost of higher buying prices and bonuses guaranteed to the herders in the contracts.

The brigadiers and other officials, called the 'bosses' (*dargalaar*), live in the central village, a good thirty kilometres from the nearest autumn pastures. It is an arduous task for them to tour the scattered camps, explaining the reforms and checking on progress. The shepherds cannot manage without them, but nevertheless the eyes they keep on the horizon are wary, especially if they have been engaged in distilling, which is strictly illegal.

Of course the hope is that the contract system will provide incentives for the herdsmen to produce and sell more. Unfortunately, at least in Tuva, this is not yet happening. Production of all major agricultural categories except wool was down in the first half of 1988 as compared with last year.<sup>6</sup> There has been a fodder crisis, even worse than usual, which will badly affect the herds in the coming winter.<sup>7</sup>

What is wrong is a nexus of economic, social, and psychological circumstances which must somehow be dealt with together if the reforms are to work. Let us look at just two of these: the 'feeling of mastery' so endlessly discussed in the Soviet newspapers, and the question of trust.

The shepherds did say to me that the contract system, and above all the lifting of the limits to private herds, gives them a greater sense of independence. In practice, however, the two play off against one another. The contract is based on norms of livestock per herder which are essentially the same for everyone (barring beginners who get a slightly reduced load). Many farms are taking the opportunity to increase the norms, which is not popular. All of the other details of the contract are worked out on the basis of the size of the flock. This means that whether you are young or old, man or woman, have a health problem or young children, or access only to second-rate pastures, the contract is the same. Consequently, it is experienced as a duty. From the managers' point of view, this inflexibility, which is

The perestroika monument in Kyzyl, capital of Tuva ASSR, which reads in red lettering 'Perestroika is the single possible path to the strengthening and development of socialism, and to the solution of the impending problems of social development in the interests of the people (from the resolutions of the 19th All-Union Conference of the C.P. of the USSR)'. The relief at the top represents Lenin, the standing figure on the left posing for the photograph is Caroline Humphrey.



Top: a yak-herder.  
Below: party secretary  
at Mogen-Buren state  
farm.



not at all enjoined in the statutes, saves time, but is also justified ideologically: 'each person in a socialist society has the same duty to the state', as one official said to me.

All contracts are public knowledge. A noticeboard in the state farm office gives the name of each team leader with details of how many animals received, how many lambs born, how many lost, diseased, taken by wolves, the average cut of wool per sheep and so forth. Party members and ambitious people take on flocks over the norm, or higher production targets from the same number of animals. The noticeboard is amended monthly. One is reminded of school.

A typical family contract team consists of a husband and wife, each with the norm of state animals. This obviously limits the number of private livestock they can care for. Use of children's labour is customary, in fact any labour one can get hold of. This explains to some extent the very large families common among the herdsmen—four or five children is considered few. It is not until retiral age, 55 for women and 60 for men, that a herder can devote himself to the private flocks. Herding is hazardous in Tuva: attacks on the flocks by wolves, bears and snow-leopards are frequent (and gun-licences are almost impossible to obtain), blizzards carry off many of the young, and brucellosis and tuberculosis are not uncommon. Only if it can be proved that the loss of an animal is the fault of the state farm does the herder not have to pay them back from his personal flock. An energetic couple, with some informal help, may be able to manage equal numbers of state and private animals, totalling around 1,000 sheep and perhaps 150 goats, 30 yaks and a few horses. But most people keep just enough private livestock to provide their food and social responsibilities for wider kin and to cover for lost animals.

In practice, a herder is quite limited in the ways he or she can dispose of private animals: it is enjoined that they should be sold to the state farm to fulfill any shortfall in its plan.<sup>8</sup> The prices are the same as for sales of state-owned herds, an obvious advantage to the farms, which thus get the labour at no cost. Only if the farm has fulfilled its quota can people sell to other farms or consumer cooperatives, and then only at the official district price. It is illegal to transport animals to another district where prices may be different. In wild places like Mongun-Taiga there is no market place. Everyone has their own animals or is kin and therefore expects to be supplied more or less free.

The herdsmen use their private flocks like savings accounts on the hoof. After retiral it is possible to build up a herd of 300-500 yaks, each animal being worth between 600 and 1,000 rubles. This is real wealth, easily enough to take holidays in Mongolia or the Crimea. Each time you want to buy something, you simply sell a few animals to the state farm. This works for the herders because the prices in each district are 'hard', i.e. guaranteed not to change for a given period of years. I had the impression that the post-retiral herders really do have a 'sense of mastery'; one told us proudly that he paid a thousand rubles every year into the Peace Fund, and another that he had given cars to each of his numerous sons.

But the system results in bottlenecks, as products are unable to flow freely through the market mechanism. Animals bought by the state farm are herded by drovers over mountain passes to a central slaughter-house in a different district. From here meat enters the mysterious channels of all-Union distribution. Not too much of it ends up in the shops in Kyzyl. This much puzzled the shepherds. 'We provide so much meat', they said.

'What happens to it?'

The self-financing system does have the advantage that it is now worthwhile to sell fringe products (horns, hooves, bone-meal, yak skins) which might earlier have gone to waste. But as with meat, the herders cannot bargain over the deal, and the farms and other buying organizations sell at much higher prices. Contracts are often barter exchanges, and the buying side often cannot fulfil its side of the bargain, e.g. paying the herder in fodder concentrates, because it cannot get hold of the transport to get out to the pastures or even the fodder itself. Such supply 'ladders' do not help the family *podryad* to a 'sense of mastery'. Of course in Soviet circumstances no-one can know what a 'fair' price is, but the herders must often have their doubts about the deal they are being offered when they see the buyers, attired modishly in leather and expensive jeans and nylon jackets, bundle their products into lorries and bowl off into the urban world.

Frequently the farm management makes things worse with a mixture of pettyfoggish rules and inefficiency: on the one hand you are supposed to feed oats to your horses, but on the other the farm may not have told you who is to pay for them, or it may have neglected to let you know of the prices, or prepared the contracts months late, or never distributed the cheque-books. Shepherds complain that farms do not recognize the quality of their work and, for example, pay equal rates for matted stuff full of twigs and rubbish as they do for good work—an example of that bogey of Soviet agriculture, 'levelling-down' (*uravnilovka*).

Nevertheless, herders do often take pride in their state-owned flocks. It is now usual to keep the same animals for the lifetime of the sheep, which means that one year's work affects the productivity of the next. How are individual standards to be maintained? This leads to the question of trust.

I asked people why their family teams were so small, why larger groups of people did not join together, when there are so many kinds of flocks to tend. In Mogen-Buren farm all the herdsmen belonged to one of five clans and in each valley everyone, more or less, was related by inter-clan marriages. It will surprise no anthropologist that the answer to my question was: outside the nuclear family no-one can be trusted.

The contract system does presuppose a great deal of trust. The flocks are not counted every day, and if someone goes away leaving the animals in charge of another herder and later it is discovered that some are missing, who is to pay? In the present system any default incurs a double loss, the damage itself and the repayment for it. Furthermore, the shepherds are pitted against one another in competitions, and those with the best 'indicators' get privileges. For this kind of reason, everyone seems to be afraid that joining up with someone else will drag them down.

In a sense this is evidence of the individual initiative that Soviet planners have been longing for. But it acts against rational cooperation as practised in pre-collectivization herding, and it shows that the *semeinyi podryad* is different in its *context* from the old family production unit. In earlier times livestock was owned by nuclear families, but the majority of the work was done by *ad hoc* cooperative groups: for pasturing, shearing, felt-making, caring for young and sick animals, milking, child-care, and so forth. Such groups were never the same for long. The cooperation could work because it was for a limited time and a specific task. If things did not work out, families could simply avoid one another.<sup>9</sup> This kind of informal mutual help has not completely disappeared. It could be revived

1. The film is part of the Granada Television 'Disappearing World' series. The team consisted of a director (John Sheppard), camera-man and sound-man, myself, a Tuvinian-Russian interpreter, a Moscow-based representative of Gosteleradio, and a Tuvinian television interviewer. It will be screened on ITV in June.

2. The Mongolian People's Republic is closely following the Soviet Union in its adoption of reforms.

3. For example, if it is estimated that a given bit of land can produce potatoes worth 1,500 rubles at local prices and the cost of production, including insurance, is 1,200 rubles, the payment for the land is 300 rubles, *Tuvinskaya Pravda* (hereafter *TP*), 4 Sept. 1988, p.2.

4. *TP*, 30 Aug 1988, p.1.

5. *TP*, 30 Aug 1988, p.3.

6. *TP*, 24 July 1988, p.1 and 6 July 1988, p.1.

7. *TP*, 27 Aug 1988, p.1.

8. *TP*, 7 Aug 1988, p.2.

9. Mongols have polite expressions for this: *khayaa niylekhgui ail* (literally, 'a bottom flap of the yurt won't unite family') and *ganzaga niylekhgui ail* (a 'saddle-straps won't tie up family'), meaning people they do not want to join up with again.

10. *TP*, 24th July 1988, p.1.

11. Referred to in T. Shanin 'Soviet agriculture and perestroika: the most urgent tasks and the furthest shore', *MSS*.

12. *TP*, 24th July 1988, p.2.

13. Shanin, *ibid.* □

among Tuvinian herders, not as a legal contract, but if people were freed from the present rules about routes, times of moves, etc.

The aim of the controls which dog the life of herdsmen is to ensure rational and equitable use of resources—exactly what was achieved by the earlier forms of cooperation—but still today they are redolent of the old Stalinist prying moralism and of course they provide work for the officials. The present system is weighted against the herdsmen and in favour of the farm management, despite the existence of contracts. Nothing much happens if the farm does not fulfil its side of the bargain.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, mistrust exists not only between the herding teams, but between them and the farm.

This results in numerous irrationalities, such as the brigade meeting to 'confirm' camp sites every few months. In fact, the sites are long planned in advance, but the shepherds will not take the responsibility of moving without confirmation because they want to be able to say it is the farm's fault if something goes wrong. For similar reasons many people prefer waged jobs to the contracts. I met one active young man who loved horses and had a contract as a horse-herder, but he was longing to become an ordinary salaried driver. With the horses he had to work at night on freezing windswept pastures to protect the herd from wolves. It was not unknown for a foal to fall into one of his wolf-traps. Veterinary help never seemed to arrive. If a foal was taken he had to make recompense, but he had few private animals. In spite of the high pay he felt the risks were not worth it. He would have preferred in fact to be based in a town. This raises the question of the viability of the whole herding way of life.

Zaslavskaya, who is probably the most influential sociologist in the USSR at present, argues that poor output figures are not the worst features of the present mode of production in Soviet agriculture: the rural social structure and the environment has suffered more.<sup>11</sup>

Even in distant Tuva there are signs that this is a correct assessment. A student wrote to the newspaper *Tuvinskaya Pravda* about her village, hidden in the mountains, without a road, the milk brigade of the state farm closed down, and with no work for the many young people living there. 'Our hay-fields, our alpine meadows, our wilderness, and then even our working hands, are no longer needed'.<sup>12</sup> Such villages are officially 'without prospects' (*neperspektivniye*), left to moulder into nothingness. Meanwhile, the farms often allow herders to crowd into the pastures near the central village, which results in deterioration of the grasslands and even grazing of hay-fields. Retired people dawdling near the settlement with their private flocks seem to cause much ire (particularly among visiting Russians who are sometimes un-Tuvinian enough to claim the

animals are insanitary). Young people too flood into the village for the company, the education, the shop goods, even just the electricity which makes it possible to have dances in the evenings.

In Mongun-Taiga this was counterbalanced by family strategies which kept at least one son on the pastures to take over from the parents. A reason for this was that herding people still have far better access to food than village dwellers, and supply the latter with provisions in return for favours. But in the long run, unless conditions on the pastures are improved the herders will become increasingly lonely heroic elderly figures, providing money and food for their kin elsewhere, and rural society may even degenerate, as it has in parts of Russia, into what Shanin calls 'a rural slum of human failures'.<sup>13</sup>

The reforms as they operate at present, the brigade and family *podryads*, will not halt the process. The cushion of 'advance' wages which do not have to be paid back means that producers can manage quite well even if they do not fulfil their contracts (up to 30% of herders in Mogen Buren). So not enough surplus is produced for the farms to be able to provide a decent standard of living for those out on the pastures. But the lease contracts, to which family *podryads* are a rather wobbly stepping-stone, might succeed. The lease contract, when it is enabled to work correctly, is the first of the reforms to give the holder a defined degree of autonomy. Only this can counteract the prevalent feeling that the reforms are really to benefit the state, not the workers. The agreement could be flexible enough to accommodate a range of flocks and two generations of herders, thus providing for an on-going autonomous production process.

The ideas which lie behind the reforms, deriving from both economists and rural sociologists, indicate a revival of the debate on the peasantry in the 1920s. Then it was still possible for Chayanov and Bukharin to defend the continued existence of individual peasant farms, and the gradual emergence in parallel, and on a voluntary basis, of various kinds of cooperative (for marketing, credit, sharing machinery, joint production, etc.) according to the level of economic development attained.

Though the hitching of types of cooperation to levels of economic development has not been revived, the essence of the current reform is the creation of a multiplicity of types of organization to adapt to local circumstances. So far the first steps have been taken, and it is a hopeful sign that 'command' is now a pejorative term in Soviet vocabulary. But improvement of local production conditions will not be enough: the hinges with the wider economy, the extremely complex problems of distribution and prices, will have to be reconsidered, and then perhaps Kyzyl will get its supplies of meat. □

