

*A Century of Russian Agriculture:
From Alexander II to Khrushchev*

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A Century
of Russian
Agriculture

by Lazar Volin

*From Alexander II
to Khrushchev*

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Foreword *by Abram Bergson*

Lazar Volin (1896–1966) was born in the Minsk province of Russia. His childhood was spent in Berlin and in Poland near Warsaw. Finally, the family moved to Harbin, where he completed the course of studies at the Russian gymnasium. After his immigration to the United States in 1915, he earned first his A.B. and then his Ph.D. in economics at the University of Michigan, and in 1926 joined the staff of the United States Department of Agriculture. He thus began to devote himself to what was to become a lifelong pursuit: the study of Russian agriculture. To that pursuit Volin would bring the advantages not only of a firm grasp of the Russian language and culture and advanced Western training in economics, but an ever deepening knowledge of Russian history. With a humanist's compassion for the Russian peasant under tsarist autocracy and Soviet dictatorship he combined an unwavering concern for scholarly objectivity.

That a remarkable career resulted goes without saying. In due time, Volin became chief of the East European Branch of the Department of Agriculture, a post he retained until his retirement in 1965. Universally recognized as one of the foremost Western authorities on Russian agriculture, he was the author of, or contributor to, hundreds of reports, essays, and other writings in the field. Many of these publications, includ-

ing a monograph, were issued by the Department of Agriculture; others appeared in professional journals. If in respect to agriculture Russia is by now far from the Churchillian enigma, that is in no small part because of the pioneering efforts of Lazar Volin.

In undertaking this volume, Volin clearly was seeking to set down summarily a lifetime's researches and reflections. The result is an outstanding achievement. In one volume a distinguished scholar recounts the story of Russian agriculture over the century extending from the eve of the Emancipation to the post-Stalinian USSR, from Alexander II to Khrushchev and Brezhnev and Kosygin; a distinguished scholar, furthermore, who properly sees Russia's "agrarian problem" in the perspective of the historical relations between agriculture and the whole economy, and is able to bring to bear on its study an immense learning, extending from the thought of the narodniks of the last century to the misfortunes of Soviet agronomy under Stalin's Lysenko.

When he died on December 6, 1966, Volin had nearly completed a final revision of the draft of his manuscript which had previously been accepted by Harvard University Press. As far as possible, the revised manuscript has been subjected to only the usual press editing for style and clarity of exposition, though here and there the deletion of a dated passage was unavoidable. In a few cases, a clearly inadvertent factual or other lapse had also to be repaired.

The editing of so large a manuscript without the author's collaboration was a formidable task. Warmest thanks are due to Mrs. Joyce Lebowitz and Mrs. Margaretta Fulton, of the Harvard University Press, for the skill and diligence that they exercised in carrying it out. We must be deeply grateful also to Harry Walters, a former associate of Dr. Volin's, for reviewing the editing and counseling on the innumerable queries that were inevitably encountered. Dr. Edward L. Keenan was kind enough to check the transliteration of Russian words throughout.

In preparing a final revision, Dr. Volin apparently intended to bring up all strands of his story to the advent of Brezhnev and Kosygin. This he did not always succeed in doing and, as might be expected, the shortfall is to be noted especially in the final chapters, that is, from Chapter 19 on. Volin himself wrote elsewhere, however, of later developments in respect to the matters discussed there, and the reader seeking his views on them may wish to refer to his "Khrushchev and the Soviet Agricultural Scene" in *Soviet and East European Agriculture*, edited by Jerzy F. Karcz, University of California Press, 1967. Also useful are two reports of the Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, to which Dr. Volin contributed: *Soviet Grain Imports*, ERS-Foreign-135, September 1965, and *The USSR and Eastern Europe: Agricultural Situation*, ERS-Foreign-151, March, 1966.