

AGRICULTURE

Rain Drowned Malenkov

Khrushchev, head of Russia's Communist Party, gambled on rain and won, which meant demotion for Ex-Premier Malenkov. Vast agricultural program seen.

► A DROUGHT in Russia last year would have saved the premiership for Georgi M. Malenkov. A drought this spring and summer can spell an end for Nikita S. Khrushchev, new first secretary of the Communist Party.

Khrushchev gambled on rain east of the Ural Mountains last year, where his vast agricultural "battle for grain" is now going on, and won. But unless he is firmly entrenched in the power seat of the Kremlin before harvest time this year, a drought could dry up his farm program and leadership.

Russia is suffering from an unfavorable economic balance with a population that increases at an estimated 3,000,000 persons a year, and a food supply that does not keep pace. As a solution, Khrushchev initiated the battle for grain last year, which called for an immense increase of new land to be devoted to grain crops.

So vast is Khrushchev's grain cultivation program that it calls for about a fivefold increase from last year to this, and an increase

of from 12 to 13 times the amount of new land to be sown to grain by next year. Last year, the Russians undertook to cultivate only 5,700,000 new acres. This year, the amount of new lands to be sown will be increased to 26,400,000 and it is planned that in 1956, from 69,000,000 to 74,000,000 new acres will be put under the plow.

The new land, or land long uncultivated, for the program is to be cultivated entirely by tractor power. It is to be carried out mostly in the area east of the Urals and principally in southwestern Siberia and Kazakhstan.

It is in this area that rain becomes the most important factor. This part of the Soviet Union has a short growing period, averaging 120 days.

The annual precipitation is less than 16 inches. Droughts in the late spring and summer, aggravated by hot dry winds that whip across the Steppes, are the rule rather than the exception.

The harvest period, which is when rain does fall for the most part, makes drying

the grain a problem and complicates the combine operations.

In 1953, a drought in this area cut production, but 1954 was a good year and the crop production increased appreciably. Khrushchev's program of increased production seemed to work. He was now in a position to dictate. If a drought had occurred during the expansion of acreage last year, he would have failed and Malenkov could have eliminated Khrushchev.

Malenkov's admission that he failed in agricultural production increases indicates that he had been opposed to Khrushchev's rapid expansion program. He was forced to acknowledge its success publicly.

American agricultural experts are skeptical concerning the future success of the new battle for grain. They say that a greater part of the land chosen for the program is not suitable for good production.

In addition to the problems of climate, there is an inadequate supply of workers in this sparsely settled region of Russia. Another problem is weeds and there is also the problem that a considerable amount of the new land is alkaline soil that would take gradual reclamation before it could be turned over to grain crops.

Time and climate will be the eventual dictators of the success of the new battle for grain in Russia, but it is believed that Khrushchev is hoping for a good storm to weather this spring and summer.

Purges Help Khrushchev

► NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV'S power in the Kremlin has been strengthened. The purging of the ministers of state farms and for the coal industry on March 2 means that the Russians are giving the "full steam ahead" treatment to the programs for heavy industry and increased grain production, pushed by Khrushchev.

Both A. I. Kozlov, formerly minister of state farms, and A. S. Zasyadko, formerly minister for the coal industry, worked under former premier Georgi Malenkov, who opposed the heavy industry push and the increased grain battle.

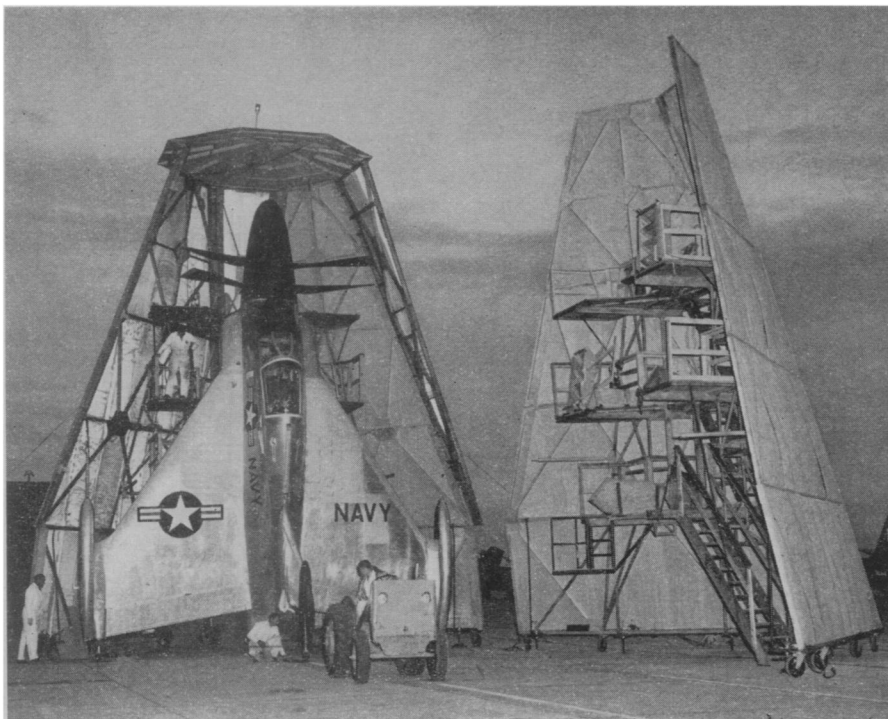
State farms have assumed an increasing importance in Khrushchev's plan to cultivate more than 100,000,000 new acres of Russian soil for grain crops between 1954 and 1956.

The problem in the coal industry is a little more puzzling to American observers. Russia's coal reserves, the amount of coal thought to be underground and untapped, are estimated to be 1,200,000 million metric tons, or 24% of the world's total. This is compared to 1,723,000 million metric tons in the United States, or 34% of the world's total.

In addition to having a good reserve, Russia's coal production has steadily increased since the war and is higher now than at any time before World War II.

It is believed, however, that Russia's increases in coal production in the last few years have been mainly in low grade coal and lignite.

Science News Letter, March 12, 1955



TEPEE FOR "POGO"—A tractor maneuvers the XF-1 "Pogo" plane into position for housing in its unique hangar at Brown Field Naval Auxiliary Air Station near San Diego, Calif. The tepee-shaped hangar on wheels enfolds the plane like halves of a clamshell. The tepee's triple-deck work platform permits easy access to every part of the plane.