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Problems of Professional Ethics in Farm Management and in the Rural Environment

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If by professional ethics, we mean that part of general ethics (in a narrow sense) which deals with the behaviour standards of particular importance in a given profession, then the profession of agricultural technicians and engineers, practised in a socialist system, would be too young to have by now as highly developed an ethical codex as may be found in other professions formed many centuries ago, e.g. the professions of teacher, officer, lawyer, journalist, etc.

The group of agricultural technicians and engineers is highly differentiated from the professional viewpoint, because of the diversity of positions occupied in the official hierarchy, and consequently of the scope and kind of functions performed by particular categories of worker, and of the extent to which they are concerned with agricultural production and the rural population. In addition to the managers of state farms and other agricultural enterprises, there are public administration officials, agents dealing with purchasing contracts, agricultural advisers, teachers, etc.; they can all be found in this group. One can thus speak separately about the ethics of an enterprise manager, of a teacher, or a social and economic worker, etc.

Any educated agricultural specialist (technician, engineer) performs management functions to some extent and is simultaneously a social and economic worker in his particular rural environment. The moral qualities of an agricultural specialist who manages a large farm or performs the functions of an instructor or adviser of small farm owners, have a strong influence on the formation of human relationships: in the first case, among the crew of the enterprise; in the latter, among the local community. Such a person, being at the same time clearly exposed to moral judgements and social opinions, is in fact the agricultural specialist who is in everyday contact with country life, as an agricultural school teacher, an agricultural adviser or cooperative official. It is just this kind of specialist, who, owing

to his professional functions, also occupies the position of rural social worker.

The present rural population looks for high moral principles, both personal and professional, in any agricultural specialist who is in contact with the producers (farmers). He is appraised, as a rule, very strictly, but at the same time, justly. The moral qualities of an agricultural worker are expected by the rural population to be, if not higher, at least at the same level as his professional qualities. Among nine personal qualities most appreciated, the farmers in an inquiry named six qualities of ethical or moral kinds and only three of professional value.

It shows that an indispensable and main component of the authority of an agricultural specialist, who is also a social worker, is his moral standing, in addition, of course, to his professional knowledge and official authority connected with his duty.

Rural people value very highly a real, sincere involvement of the agricultural worker in his everyday problems, and willingly accept the leadership of someone who will exert a positive and progressive influence upon the environment. In such cases he will not only enjoy the high esteem of the rural population, but will also win their goodwill. They will be proud of him. The worker not involved in everyday country life can be at most only tolerated.

Our investigations show that the interrelation between an agricultural worker and the rural people in his localicy can be one of three kinds: (1) strained, (2) indeterminate, (3) harmonious. It depends principally on the moral qualities of his personality. If the relationship is indeterminate or strained his influence upon the production process and its effects will be, as a rule, insignificant.

The influence of the ethical attitude of an agricultural engineer or technician upon the human relationships within a community, and indirectly upon production, manifests itself most distinctly in situations of disagreement which demand model behaviour. Such situations arise from a background of revolutionary changes in economic and social interrelationships as well as from changes in the social consciousness of the rural population. These may be a consequence of a change of system of values, including moral standards. A source of conflict may be divergences between traditional ways of thinking by farmers and the needs or aspirations of the young rural generation, the pressure of obscuranist groups or cliques upon the managers of rural institutions, the contradictions between farmers' interests, represented in some degree by the agricultural specialist, and the agrarian policy of government etc.

From the ethical viewpoint the behaviour of workers coming to the country (farm) as controllers, superintendents, inspectors, valuers, lecturers, instructors or advisers etc., is important. The behaviour of these

people is bitterly criticized by the rural population, particularly in two cases: when symptoms of a profiteering attitude appear, and when there is a flippant approach to country obligations.

In his everyday life, the ethical attitude of a manager or a rural worker depends not only on the subjective qualities of his personality, but also, conspicuously, on the functioning of social institutions in a socialist state.