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From State Farm to State Administration? The Fate of Municipalization Reforms in the Rural Perm Region

This paper uses two less commonly traveled paths of analysis to approach the popular topic of competition for power between Russian state officials and private enterprises. The first of these paths is determined by my research site: while many studies of the interaction between state agencies and private firms have been based on the industrial and financial sectors, my material comes from the often overlooked post-Soviet agricultural sector. The data I analyze have been collected during twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork in Sepych, an agricultural town in the Vereshchagino district of the Perm region, over the period of 2001-2004 (ten months in 2001 and shorter visits in 2002 and 2004). In the conclusion, I make some observations about how attention to the agricultural sector might or might not tell us about the broader picture.

The second less commonly traveled path of analysis is the “ethnography of the state,” a relatively young but rapidly growing body of theoretical literature in anthropology.¹ This is not the place for a full literature review, but I do want to make explicit three of the assumptions that inform this paper. First, on an analytic level, I assume that “the state” is not an “it,” not a bounded entity that acts uniformly. “The state” is, rather, a field of competing social relations, the full scope of which are obscured if one buys into state officials’ own claims to coherence or assertions that “the state” is firmly marked off from “society” (see esp. Mitchell 1999). Second, I assume that what people imagine the state to be, and how they imagine proper state officials to act, is nonetheless very significant. For example, if one

¹ Stellar examples include Coronil 1997 and Mueggler 2001. In the socialist and postsocialist worlds, see esp. Kligman 1998, Humphrey 2002, and Verdery 1995; 1996.

wants to change the nature of a particular state, it is not enough simply to “get the institutions right” as many have argued in the transition from socialism. One must also transform perceptions, imaginations, and everyday practices—those of state officials and ordinary citizens alike. These are non-trivial aspects of what constitutes the social field of the state and the exercise of state power. They are also infinitely more diverse, slippery, mutable, adaptable, and opportunistic than is commonly thought by architects of state restructuring or captured by such broad-bore terms as “political culture” or “Soviet mentality.” Third, I assume that there are no universally proper attributes of “stateness” that can serve as implicit or explicit analytic benchmarks for the evaluation of whether any particular country is on the “right” course. I do, however, treat *others’* use of such benchmarks (such as the IMF’s) as part of the data to be explained.

The specific problematic I address is the fate of attempts to “municipalize” state power in rural Russia after socialism. Along with the decollectivizing reforms of the early 1990s, Soviet agricultural enterprises—including the state farm based in Sepych (pronounced SEP-itch)—were to shed the “state” aspect of their Soviet-era portfolios in a process that has generally been referred to as “municipalization.” Segments of State Farm Sepych, such as the House of Culture and its employees, were to be turned over to the purview of the local state administration (*mestnaia administratsia*), successor to the Soviet-era rural soviet (*sel’soviet*). Responsibility for town infrastructure, too, was to shift from the privatizing agricultural enterprises to local municipal authorities. Snowplowing, sidewalk construction, and streetlight maintenance, for instance, were all to become the domain of the local state administration, run by a “head of administration” (*glava administratsii*). Notionally, that is, the business of privatized rural firms would be just that: business.

Municipalization, however, was neither either easy nor complete in Sepych by 2004; in fact, it might well be argued to have failed, at least judging by the terms set by those who designed it. Most townspeople still refer to the long-since privatized local agricultural enterprise as “the state farm” (*sovkhos*). When they talk about their work for the farm, they usually call their employment “state work” (*gosudarstvennaia rabota*), contrasting it to “private” entrepreneurs (*chastniki*) such as new shopkeepers or to their own domestic plots. When they steal grain from the farm’s warehouses, they say they are stealing from the state (“the state is a bottomless pit!” I was often told). When they want to complain about

drunkenness or when the streetlights don't work or the town's rickety water system needs patching, they appeal to the director of the farm or one of his brigade leaders. They do not, for the most part, take their concerns to the "real" representative of the state in town, the appointed "head of administration" under whose purview things like streetlights and sidewalks technically fall. In fact, even the local administration itself is often a petitioner for and recipient of the farm's patronage. Local state representatives thus have consolidated very little power, respect, or legitimacy in town, and nearly everyone acknowledges that the balance of power tips heavily in favor the director of the local enterprise, now called AOZT Sepych.

I want to examine how and why this situation has come about, and ask what it tells us about postsocialist state forms. My argument proceeds in four parts. The first section introduces in more detail the Soviet-era organization of and expectations about state power in rural areas, the baseline for the transformations I discuss in the remainder of the paper. It also highlights some of the particularities of the path to decollectivization adopted in Sepych, in order to lay the groundwork for determining to what extent my conclusions might apply elsewhere. In the second and third sections, I use ethnographic data to compare relationships between individual households in Sepych and the two post-Soviet rural institutions in question: the now-privatized state farm and the local administration. I explore each vector by examining three kinds of exchange relationship that are central to the ways townspeople think of and act with respect to "the state": salaries, patronage, and theft.² These sections concentrate, following from my general assumptions, on the ways in which townspeople imagine those in power should act, in these cases as partners in exchange. The final section brings the two sides of this comparison together in the context of a contentious town meeting in Sepych, draws some conclusions, and makes preliminary suggestions about their possible relevance for other domains of postsocialist statehood.

² I should be clear: it is not my argument that these are the *only* ways in which people relate to "the state." In the economic conditions I discuss below, however, they are ones most squarely on the minds of most townspeople.

Vectors of State Power in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Countryside

In this section, I want to provide several pieces of background against which the ethnographic material I discuss in more detail must be understood: the organization of state power in rural areas during the Soviet period; Soviet-era expectations about how one went about consolidating power; and the general course of decollectivization in post-Soviet Sepych.

There were three primary vectors of Soviet state power in the countryside: state or collective farms, Communist Party organs, and administrative rural soviets. The relative strengths and weaknesses of these vectors in the meant that the local administration and privatizing State Farm Sepych began “the transition” in 1991 from quite different places. Rural soviets were the lowest rung of Soviet rural civil administration; as Humphrey ([1983]1998:118-126) has shown, they were the weakest of the three vectors of state power. For one thing, following the ideology of a workers’ state, the place of employment (such as State Farm Sepych) was designed to be the locus of as much social organization and activity as possible. In state farms such as State Farm Sepych, all farm property was state property, all employees were state employees, and the state farm was responsible for everything from housing to after-hours entertainment. More importantly, however, enterprise directors were more powerful than the representatives of the rural soviets because the operations they oversaw produced goods useable for all manner of unofficial purposes. The socialist shortage economy privileged those who had greater control over the goods, favors, and bribes that flowed in all manner of directions outside the official plan. Administrative rural soviets had less control over these goods; enterprise directors and party members had much more.

I should say more about how this was so, how the relative strengths and weaknesses of state agencies was tied to their access to goods, or “manipulable resources” in Humphrey’s phrasing. Intimately related to the organization of state power were widely-held and entirely unofficial expectations about *how* one went about accumulating and consolidating power in socialist systems. These expectations and sensibilities form a second piece of important background for the kinds of transformations I discuss after 1991. Socialist societies, with their centrally planned and “rational redistributive” organization, created special conditions

for accumulation and exchange; they are usefully conceptualized as variants of “wealth in people” systems.³ Wealth in people refers to a mode of accumulation analogous to but quite different from the accumulation of wealth in capital central to capitalist systems.

In socialist contexts, the importance of collecting people was a response to the widespread shortage created by socialist central planning (see Kornai 1980, Ledeneva 1998, Verdery 1991; 1996). In order to make ends meet in conditions of shortage, socialist citizens trafficked in all manner of horizontal and vertical rights and obligations outside the plan. Built up over time, these rights and obligations created networks that could be deployed for purposes as varied as meeting quotas at a large enterprise and obtaining scarce products to put on the dinner table. To advance in this system, one accumulated not capital but people—in the shape of obligations owed through larger and larger networks. Successful managers of socialist enterprises, such as State Farm Sepych, were those who could most adroitly wheel and deal in networks that extended far beyond their own firms. Heads of rural soviets, with fewer use-rights over goods and state property, were the weakest of rural state agencies. I will argue shortly that competition over wealth in people characterized the post-Soviet period as well, although in significantly different ways and for different reasons.

Finally, the route to privatization and the “destatification” of state farms that was chosen in Sepych also has important consequences for the exchanges on which I focus in the middle sections of this paper. The Yeltsin administration’s first decrees on rural decollectivization came in late 1991; their many modifications and permutations gave rise to a range of organizational possibilities in the post-Soviet countryside (Humphrey 1998:444-481; Wegren 1998). The membership of State Farm Sepych, on the strong advice of their long-time director Andrei Petrovich,⁴ voted for “closed joint stock company” (AOZT) status, which allowed the farm to retain much of its Soviet-era brigade structure and permitted only

³ Humphrey’s ([1983]1998) monograph on collective farms in Buryatia was the first to draw attention to the Soviet system as a “hierarchy of administrative rights held in practice” and to identify the importance of this organization for the flow of vertical and horizontal exchanges. I prefer “wealth in people” to “rights in people” because I think it more accurately captures obligations as well as rights (see esp. Dunn 2004; Verdery 2003:61-63) and because “wealth” draws attention to the importance of accumulation. See Guyer (1995) for an example of the ways in which anthropologists have analyzed “wealth in people” in African contexts.

⁴ In keeping with standard anthropological practice, I have disguised the identities of all townspeople who appear in my discussion by changing names and altering many identifying details.

current and former employees to hold shares, vote at meetings, and hope for yearly dividends.⁵ Without the state inputs and support of the Soviet era, productivity levels and salaries at AOZT Sepych promptly plunged. There was never enough remaining at the end of the year for the initially much-discussed shareholders' dividends; money virtually disappeared for months at a time. For much of the 1990s, AOZT Sepych (which I also call "the commercial farm") was nearly bankrupt. In the eyes of reformers, as I have already noted, the farm was also supposed to relinquish its claim state functions, turning them over to the newly empowered local administrations that replaced rural Soviets and concentrating on its business goals.

Other post-Soviet changes that came with privatization helped scuttle this attempt to transfer power from state farms to state administrations. These changes had much to do with the increasing importance of domestic economies and the risks, uncertainties, and inequalities in the household sector. Individual households, unlike the AOZT Sepych, did not have the luxury of operating in bankruptcy—they needed at least some money. With the largest private employer in town (AOZT Sepych) paying salaries only irregularly, and with the more general disappearance of Soviet-era social safety nets, townspeople in Sepych turned increasingly to their own barns and household plots. Doctors and teachers rapidly overcame their Soviet-era disdain for milking cows, and in the 1990s only a small handful of townspeople could rely on enough salary income to go without some combination of pigs, cattle, fowl, and supplementary potato plots. Expanded garden fences and large new backyard sties were common sights in Sepych in 2001, testament to the ways in which agricultural production continued to "involute" (Burawoy et al. 2000; Humphrey 1998; 2002:164-174). Households became what Humphrey calls the "center of gravity" of post-Soviet agriculture; in order to survive, households needed ever-increasing amounts of inputs (tractor time, grain, labor, feed, manure, and so on). Where and how to get them? One solution was other households, a possibility I discuss elsewhere (Rogers 2005).

⁵ Konstantinov (1997) terms this arrangement an "insiders' collective." It was one of the most popular choices for privatizing enterprises across Russia. In 2001, new laws governing the organization of enterprises forced Sepych to change its name again, from AOZT Sepych to SPK (Agricultural Production Collective) Sepych. This change brought few, if any, immediate consequences for its organization or operation; for the sake of clarity I stay with AOZT Sepych to refer to the farm in the post-Soviet era.

Another was larger rural institutions. The next two sections analyze vectors of exchange between households and the dual heirs to the socialist state: AOZT Sepych and Sepych's local administration. In the section on AOZT Sepych, I discuss three vectors of flow along which goods and services traveled from the commercial farm to households and explore the ways in which each kind of exchange enabled households to mitigate the risks of intensified domestic production and "get by" in uncertain times. I also indicate how each served the interests of those more highly placed in the commercial farm—chiefly, though not exclusively, the director—in solidifying power and collecting "wealth in people." I then consider these same three vectors of exchange in relationships between households and the local state administration, viewing them in the context of the local administration's attempts to take up the new responsibilities associated with municipalization. I will argue, among other things, that strict Treasury accounting reforms and audits, enacted across the Russian Federation to combat "corruption" at the behest of international lending agencies, have in fact hamstrung state officials' ability to be flexible with resources and meet townspeople's expectations for properly "acting like a state," both for their own employees and the town as a whole.

Employees of the local administration, that is, found it much more difficult to accumulate wealth in people by instilling obligations in the townspeople they served. In sum, townspeople continued to value and find useful a variant of socialist-era relationships between themselves and larger rural institutions. The simultaneous willingness of AOZT Sepych to enter into as many of these relationships as possible and the inability of local administration officials to do the same led to a balance of power and wealth in people that heavily favored the director of the private AOZT Sepych.

Households and AOZT Sepych

AOZT Sepych was a variation of what Humphrey has usefully termed a "suzerainty." In these post-Soviet fiefdoms, the disappearance of Soviet-era centralized authority allowed regional or local bosses to exert substantial control over their former domains and administer them with a high degree of autonomy (2002:5-20; see also Verdery 1996:205-7). In some cases, Humphrey shows, this autonomy extended to printing money and even aspirations to

declare independent statehood, as in the proposed “State of Bayangol” (Humphrey 1998:492-5). In the vast majority of my conversations about AOZT Sepych, the director Andrei Petrovich was indeed lionized as the linchpin holding Sepych together, keeping its commercial farm and its people from “falling apart.”⁶ More accumulated wealth in people in the Soviet period correlated strongly with more powerful suzerainties in the post-Soviet period. Because he had been director for more than twenty-five years, Andrei Petrovich’s fiefdom was one of the most powerful in the rural areas of the western Perm region. In this section, I explore the vectors of exchange that enabled him and his brigade leaders to continue consolidating power, often, as I show more fully later, at the expense of the local state administration.

Commercial Farm Credit and Stores

When I lived in Sepych, everyone in town who worked received cash salaries, whether from the commercial farm or from other institutions. The mid-1990s crises of demonetization, payment in kind, and lengthy delays in salaries were both a thing of the past and a recent enough memory to keep townspeople slightly apprehensive about coming paydays. As important as salaries were for maintaining a degree of cash liquidity in their households, the commercial farm also permitted townspeople to elect not to take cash. This option both provided some flexibility for farm employees and created new sorts of distinctions between those who continued to work in the AOZT Sepych and those who worked elsewhere or had no jobs at all.

Andrei Petrovich allowed and encouraged opportunities for to his workers to acquire a range of goods and services by purchasing them against their coming salaries, flexibility that was not possible in the strictly monitored budgets of the state organizations discussed below.⁷ In the case of services that could be provided by the commercial farm, such as

⁶ “Falling apart” in this context meant dissolving into constituent households, the other main option for agricultural enterprises after the Soviet Union. Many of those enterprises that did not transform themselves into joint-stock companies like AOZT Sepych split up the enterprise’s assets among all of the member households.

⁷ Although broadly similar opportunities existed at a much smaller scale elsewhere in Sepych—school teachers could buy bread in the school cafeteria against their salaries—this form of credit was a much-discussed benefit of working in the commercial farm.

plowing a household plot or mowing a meadow, Andrei Petrovich provided steep discounts to employees. The accounting office simply subtracted the cost against future salaries. The standard cost of commercial farm services for non-employees was nearly twice as high as it was for employees; unless they made special arrangements with Andrei Petrovich or some side deal with a brigade leader, non-farm workers had to pay cash at the cashier's office, having no payroll account to subtract from. This meant that even those townspeople who did not leave the commercial farm to pursue higher-paid entrepreneurial activities did not have to worry nearly as much as they otherwise might have about the affordability of necessary inputs to their important household economies. It further isolated those new unemployed townspeople—Humphrey's "dispossessed" (2002:21-39)—who had no salaried employment anywhere.

During my time in Sepych, one of the most heralded accomplishments of AOZT Sepych was to open its own stores, at which workers could make everyday purchases against their salaries. In one of our conversations, Andrei Petrovich couched his sponsorship of the stores in familiar terms: people asked for it and he was more than happy to do what he could for them. Although this is no doubt the case, permitting credit at the commercial farm stores also allowed AOZT Sepych the dual benefits of profit margins on goods sold and a more flexible level of liquidity in its own accounts, since it was reducing the size of the cash payouts to its employees while not reducing their salaries. Moderate and flexible liquidity was, in other words, as desirable at the commercial farm level of organization as at the household level.

The commercial farm payroll, run out of the central accounting office, was in fact a mass of debits and credits, not only in accounts at the new commercial farm stores, but among commercial farm workers themselves. Money could be transferred among workers to settle debts or collect money for a common purpose. If, for example, it was someone's birthday and the brigade or smaller group planned to celebrate at work, money could be collected directly from everyone's payroll account. On one such birthday, the woman who was organizing the celebration commandeered an entire bus from the commercial farm, piling all of her guests into it for a picnic in a faraway meadow. When I asked the driver what he was getting out of the deal, he replied that she would write off a bottle for him; that

is, she would simply transfer twenty rubles for a bottle of moonshine to his salary account from hers.

The various provisions for credit associated with commercial farm salaries thus provided opportunities for farm employees to even out some of the bumps of economic transformation that came from unexpected bursts of inflation or demonetization. Some in town, however, saw the commercial farm's provision of credit as manifestly unfair, because it was provided only to its own workers and not to anyone else. Here then, was one way in which Andrei Petrovich and the leadership of AOZT Sepych mitigated some inequalities by establishing others, in this case by providing cut-rate services and credit to employees but not to others. From Andrei Petrovich's perspective, he was working for his people; those not in the farm either should be (his opinion of the unemployed), were someone else's responsibility, were making money through their own entrepreneurial activities, or had to find another route to access the farm's services. Those in the farm had a new set of obligations to the director; many of those outside the farm wished they did (or relied on a family member's).

Patronage: Farm Goods and Services

A second significant set of relationships between the commercial farm and individual households revolved around patronage: "unofficial" transfers of good or services from the commercial farm to individual households at the request of workers and former workers. Even after the disappearance of central planning, patronage of the sort often discussed in the socialist period remained a central aspect of relationships between the commercial farm leadership and households in Sepych. This post-Soviet patronage, however, existed in quite different economic, social, and moral landscapes than the "manipulable resources" of the Soviet era's shadow economy. The rising importance of cash salaries was chief among these. Salaries were regular, more depersonalized, and a matter of strategic decisions by the director and his chief economist. Patronage transactions, on the other hand, were irregular and highly personalized. Employees at lower tiers of the commercial farm, down to the brigade level, might act as patrons in ways similar the director, giving workers tractor time or other favors of which their higher-ups were often not aware. Here, I give just one of many possible

examples of the ways in which state farm patronage both mitigated strains in the household economy and solidified allegiance to farm higher-ups among townspeople.

In contrast to the usually quiet halls of the local state administration building, the office of the director of the commercial farm was almost without exception busy and chaotic. When he was not there, Andrei Petrovich was assumed to be—and usually was—off working his contacts in Vereshchagino and Perm. When he was there, the director not only dealt with the day-to-day problems that arose in the commercial farm, but also with a seemingly never-ending parade of visitors to his office, nearly all of them bearing one request or another, from small loans to construction materials to discounted grain.

It was usually in his office that I caught Andrei Petrovich as well. When I wanted to speak to him about some small matter or another, I would sit in the queue outside with others. The general confusion meant that the director was often dealing with multiple requests at the same time. On one occasion I found myself in his office at the same time as Anton, a young unemployed man who was there on his second trip to see the director about his elderly father's damaged roof. Andrei Petrovich asked if he had counted how many tiles they would need to redo the entire roof. Anton replied that they had counted fifty-two sheets, and at fifty rubles a piece, that would come out to 2,600 rubles. Andrei Petrovich wrote the number down on a piece of paper, stared at it, and said slowly, "That, of course, is awful." He looked up at Anton, "And this is for the barn?" "No, no," replied Anton, "the house."

Andrei Petrovich thought some more and reached for the phone to call in his chief accountant. When the accountant arrived from her office downstairs, Andrei Petrovich summarized the situation and said, "let's try to get him the roofing material for, say, half price, for 1,300. It's for his father's work." The accountant replied that she didn't quite know how they would manage that, but they would figure something out. Andrei Petrovich turned to Anton and said that the next big order for roofing shingles would probably be placed in a couple of months. He would speak to the head of the construction brigade to make sure that they ordered enough to have fifty-two pieces left for Anton to work on his father's house. Anton murmured his thanks and shuffled out, leaving Andrei Petrovich, the accountant, and me in the room. Anton himself didn't work, Andrei Petrovich said pointedly. He shook his head at the expense and said, "His father's very ill, practically blind

now. He might not even live to see his new roof.” He paused briefly, and then went on, “But it’s for his father’s work. Even if he dies, his wife will still have to live there.”

Note the cycling of rights and obligations in people in the example of Anton’s father’s roof. Although I was unable to find out what Anton’s father’s position in State Farm Sepych had been, it is safe to assume that he was, decades ago, on the receiving end of Andrei Petrovich’s patronage while in the socialist workforce. Like many others, Anton’s father stayed in Sepych, rather than leaving in the Brezhnev era rush to the cities, and labored in the state farm. When his labor was expended and he retired, Andrei Petrovich repaid that labor by providing a discount on roofing material (“it’s for his father’s work”).⁸ In doing so, he created a new set of obligations in the next generation—Anton. The mitigation of some kinds of inequalities, in this case the dismal pensions that the elderly received, was achieved through the recreation of new obligations associated with wealth in people.

Anton’s roofing project is but one example of patronage on the part of Andrei Petrovich. He made similar arrangements at a good clip each day he was in town. Nearly everyone I knew had, on one or another occasion, been to see the director for this kind of help. As a result, Andrei Petrovich’s wealth in people continued to be enormous. In particular, multi-generational cycles for the accumulation of wealth in people, as in the case of Anton’s father’s roof, were *very* rare. It was uncommon enough for enterprise directors to last as long as Andrei Petrovich did in the Soviet period; to add ten post-Soviet years was almost unheard of.

His wealth in people was, in fact, too enormous for some. The power that accrued to the director through his ability to use farm resources to aid all of this workers and many others in town meant that, for many townspeople, patronage was something to be called upon sparingly. When, for example, the commercial farm was unable to pay its salaries in cash during the mid-1990s, the proportion of compensation to workers that took the form of non-cash patronage increased exponentially. Due to the scarcity of money in town and people’s inability to obtain goods elsewhere without money, requests poured into the director’s office for all sorts of aid. As one friend put it, “Andrei Petrovich was like a king then.” Although it

⁸ AOZT Sepych did not directly pay pensions out of its accounts. Notionally, it paid a certain amount into the state pension fund each month; pensions were then paid directly to retired workers by the state. In practice, huge infusions of cash from Moscow usually supported regional pension funds. In any case, Anton’s father did not receive his pension directly from AOZT Sepych.

was always good to have patronage to fall back on, townspeople much preferred the more impersonal nature of regular salaries, which did not overtly subordinate them to the director. Patronage was an excellent option for mitigating risk and dealing with unexpected misfortunes, those rarer or extraordinary occasions when households needed a significant loan or agricultural service due to unforeseen circumstances. Patronage was also useful for larger projects to which Andrei Petrovich could contribute, but not, perhaps, finance the entire endeavor.

The salaries I discussed above were, obviously, only for those who worked in the farm itself. But the example of Anton's father's roof shows that the director's patronage, and his efforts to continue collecting wealth in people, extended beyond the farm's employees to other townspeople as well.

Theft from the Commercial Farm

Although it was almost never publicly discussed in the way that salaries, credit, and patronage were, theft was also a key vector along which goods moved from the commercial farm to households. By one friend's approximation, as inaccurate as any other, two-fifths of the grain harvest in Sepych disappeared during the course of the cycle from fall harvest to spring sowing. By most accounts, the scale of theft from the commercial farm increased in the post-Soviet period. In the collective farm era, I was told, many people found it difficult enough to smuggle home handfuls or shoefuls of grain from the collective farm.⁹ But with privatization and increasing domestic herd sizes, I was often told, townspeople stole grain in cartloads to feed their pigs and cattle, and thereby increase the profit margin on their domestic livestock (compare Humphrey 1998:463-4). Cartloads were even preferable, I learned. If one was seen walking around with a sack of grain, it looked like theft; if one were seen driving a cartload of grain, it looked like official commercial farm business.

Like salaries and patronage, theft mitigated both emerging inequalities and risks in the household sector. Unlike salaries and patronage, household theft did not move through the director's office; it was never a direct way for Andrei Petrovich to accumulate wealth in people. His brigade leaders were another story. It was commonly assumed—and backed up

⁹ On theft from collective farms, see Verdery (2003:65-69).

by all of the cases I knew—that higher-ups in the commercial farm made off with many more tons of grain than did their workers. If a combine driver could manage a couple of tons for his household, then his supervisors were likely diverting several tons to their own households and those of their families. One combine driver confided in me that he had split two tons with a neighbor who drove the “getaway” truck; but his supervisor had asked him to set aside nearly ten tons for himself and his family.

Theft, then, served as a yet another way in which the commercial farm reduced some forms of social stratification by re-instantiating others. Many townspeople could provide for their newly important livestock by procuring illicit grain in one way or another. When unemployed workers calculated the benefits of taking on short-term, low-status work in the commercial farm—such as combine driver’s assistant or guard—one element in their calculations was often whether and how much grain they would be able to make off with. Knowing this, the chief economist could easily counter any questions about the size of the salaries they received. Like credit, stolen grain allowed some flexibility in the amount of money that had to be spent from limited salaries. Like patronage, it reduced some inequalities by re-instantiating others, notably the hierarchy of the commercial farm.

On one occasion, after I had heard a good number of theft stories and had helped various friends to steal several tons of grain, some firewood, and assorted other items, I was visiting another former state farm in the district. In this town, the state farm had not privatized into a corporation (as had AOZT Sepych) but disbanded into nearly a hundred separate households, with no overarching organization. The former leaders from the state farm had managed to keep most of the farm’s assets for themselves; everyone else lived on their own household plots or worked for their former state farm supervisors in the private sector. This was, for people in Sepych, a fate to be avoided at all costs: a town where the local state farm had “fallen apart.” During my visit, the local head of administration gave me a wealth of statistics and his honest evaluation: things were better in places like Sepych, where there was work and salaries, and “people were organized.” Near the conclusion of our conversation, I asked, perhaps more directly than was advisable, “if there’s no commercial farm here, from whom do people steal?” Caught momentarily off guard, and looking at me as if he wanted to know more about what, exactly, I was spending my time doing in Sepych,

he responded that this was, in fact, a major problem. It was much harder to steal from private owners, and, in his town, there were only private owners.

One way to reduce the risks, inequalities, and impoverishment associated with the household economy was to rely on AOZT Sepych as something of an insurance policy, a common fund to be dipped into when necessary and possible. Limited theft—too much would lead to the farm’s collapse—was a good way to do this because it came with no further obligations to the director, which in most people’s cases were already extensive. (It did, however, usually come with obligations to other, lower-level workers). There were some signs that Andrei Petrovich was moving to bring theft—the only vector of exchange between the commercial farm and households that did not increase his wealth in people—under his purview as well. He talked on several occasions, including at the annual meeting of shareholders I attended, of shifting this form of risk and inequality reduction to the official accounts of the commercial farm. He set one of the long-term goals of the commercial farm as providing a set amount of grain to workers’ households each year as a condition of employment, “so that people don’t have to look around for grain” each year. The extra “official” grain would mean that theft would be less necessary. Townspeople, in other words, would have to look to him.

Coda: What To Do With All That Wealth in People?

Andrei Petrovich, I have argued throughout this section, worked to mitigate the strains that tugged at the household sector in Sepych after socialism. He did this in many ways, most of which involved continuing to amass wealth in people. The net result, as I have shown, was multiple vectors of inequality in town and hence, one might suggest, the slowing of class formation. As I will show shortly, his efforts also helped pull the rug out from underneath efforts to municipalize power, to transfer “state functions” to the local administration. Before I develop this side of the comparison, though, it is useful to ask: What to do with all that wealth in people? Why amass it? There are several answers.

The first is prestige. I have tried to convey throughout the extent to which townspeople, for the most part, genuinely approved of Andrei Petrovich’s efforts. They were thought to be nothing short of heroic in light of widespread devaluation and primitive accumulation occurring elsewhere in the Russian countryside. In townspeople’s view, the

alternative to having a commercial farm was not having one, of having instead only a household sector plus a few well-off private peasant farmers (with no entity to steal from and only one vector of inequality—that between households.) If a town was going to have a commercial farm, it might as well have a prestigious director. The second reason is financial. Andrei Petrovich, it was surmised by most townspeople, helped himself to small amounts of AOZT Sepych's income when he needed it. I have no direct evidence of this, but it would be consistent with the practice of many others in his position. His high level of prestige and the number of obligations owed him meant that this presumed vector of transaction between AOZT Sepych and one particular household (the director's) was tolerated by most.

The third reason, however, is the most interesting. What, one might reasonably ask, was Andrei Petrovich still doing way out in Sepych anyway? He had long been a member of the highest level Soviet and post-Soviet committees in Perm and spent a good deal of time on the roads back and forth to meetings about the future of agriculture in the Urals. Why had he not converted his enormous wealth in people and connections in Perm into a much higher position? It wasn't, in fact, for lack of trying. Andrei Petrovich ran for the office of head of the entire Vereshchagino district in the mid-1990s. He lost. In a close election, I was told, most people in Sepych voted against him, in order to keep him from leaving his post as director of AOZT Sepych. In this case, the Soviet-era answer to the question of what to do with wealth in people—turn it into a higher position in the party-state bureaucracy—was thwarted by the votes of the accumulated people. Wealth in people did not get one *entirely* as far as it could in the Soviet period.

Households, The Local Administration, and Anti-Corruption Reforms

I have, so far, covered only one half of the comparison I have set up. I now turn to relationships between households and the local state administration. After AOZT Sepych, various state organizations employed the greatest number of townspeople in Sepych, whether in offices of the local administration itself or in the divisions of larger ministries of the Russian government with a presence in town: school (Education), hospital (Health), or club and library (Culture). Most townspeople who did not work in the commercial farm were state “budget workers” (*budzhelniki*) in these institutions. In addition, as I mentioned at the outset, the process of rural decollectivization was intended to transfer “state” functions and

responsibilities from the socialist enterprises such as State Farm Sepych to the local administration. Local representatives of the state thus had nested responsibilities: to their own workers and to the town as a whole. I show in this section that the configuration of salaries, patronage, and theft associated with the local administration was quite different from that in the commercial farm. Local state officials' efforts to attend appropriately to their own workers and to accumulate even moderate obligations or wealth in people among townspeople more broadly were severely hampered for several reasons. Some of the reasons for this outcome were particular to Sepych; others were the result of much broader processes. The results pointed in the same direction: largely failed state-building and exceedingly weak state power in rural areas.

The first set of reasons for the weakness of local administrations is structural. As heirs to the very weak Soviet-era rural soviets, they began the post-Soviet period with a much smaller endowment of connections and expectations than the successors to the much more powerful state or collective farms on their territory. This situation was exacerbated by transition-era reforms of the state structure. For instance, the post-Soviet heads of local administration were not elected officials. They were appointed by and served at the pleasure of elected district-level heads of administration, who were usually based in the most urban area of the district (in the case of Sepych, this meant the city of Vereshchagino, which had 15 local administrations). Although I have no direct evidence for this in the case of Sepych, this arrangement meant that district heads of administration had an incentive to appoint relatively weak local heads of administration for distant rural areas of their district like Sepych. If at least some of the lower-level heads of administration were weak, their superiors at the district level could concentrate their resources on the urban center where most of the votes were. Rural heads of administration then took all of the heat from annoyed townspeople and villagers; their superiors could attempt to skate above the fray and publicly blame their appointees for less than satisfactory work.

A second reason for their weakness was that local administrations simply had less to offer that was of use to townspeople than did commercial farms, as I discuss in more detail below. Perhaps the most *potentially* significant item over which the local administration in Sepych had some control was the allocation of land. However, as long as AOZT Sepych continued to "hold together," land was not so much an issue as one might expect. The vast

majority of the land around Sepych was leased to the commercial farm by its members as part of the terms of the incorporation of AOZT Sepych. These were “paper” shares, not pegged to any specific parcel of land unless the shareholder withdrew them from the corporation with the intent of working them independently (no one had done this in Sepych). A small amount of land was in the hands of Sepych’s few peasant farmers, who had set up their operations in the early 1990s. Most townspeople did make use of hayfields and supplementary potato plots that they leased from the local administration. This was not, however, scarce land; for anyone who wanted extra hayfields, they only needed to ask and pay rent. Nor was this land fraught with the problems of restitution of specific plots that had been confiscated during collectivization (as was the case, say, in Romania—see Verdery 2003).

Control over this land was also not in the hands of the local head of administration directly; a separate land specialist oversaw the distribution and taxation of hay meadows and potato plots. In 2001, the post of land specialist was moved up to the district level, taking it out of the local administration’s purview altogether. Although the same specialist occupied the same office in Sepych, he was no longer technically part of the local administration at all. “If,” AOZT Sepych disbanded into constituent households, a member of the local administration said to me on one occasion, “then it would be war.”¹⁰ As it was, the land specialist’s office was more or less quiet. Indeed, those who wanted a little extra haying land might have first asked Andrei Petrovich rather than the local administration; the director of AOZT Sepych could trade haying land for something other than cash rent.

This point leads to a third reason often cited by local administration officials for their inability to collect people: the creeping audit culture arising from the Russian Federation’s attempts to implement Treasury System and other accounting reforms.¹¹ These top-down reforms, prompted by the lending conditions of international aid agencies concerned with “corruption,” made it more and more difficult for state officials in Sepych to go through the various manipulations of salaries, patronage, and theft that circled through the commercial farm and were the basis for the accumulation of wealth in people by Andrei Petrovich and his subordinates. Although inputs from the state allowed partial diversification and risk

¹⁰ Humphrey reports almost exactly the same language in Buryatia (1998:473).

¹¹ See especially Dunn (2003) on corruption and audit.

management for some households, I argue here that the regulatory environment in which these transactions took place (and this would include land transactions) actually hamstrung the local administration, leaving much of local power in the now-private hands of AOZT Sepoch. Although local administrations began the post-Soviet period in a relatively weak condition, by 2004, the chief reasons for further declines in their effectiveness had to do with these regulations.

Before turning to the concrete examples of exchanges between households and the local administration, it will be useful to introduce these accounting reforms in more detail. One of the chief battlegrounds of state reform in post-1991 Russia has been the federal budget. In 1998, the year of Russia's major financial crisis, an estimated fifty percent of state funds flowed outside the purview of the budget. The central government in Moscow often used the flexibility afforded by these off-budget accounts to negotiate with and attempt to buy the loyalty of leaders in Russia's powerful regions (see Solnick 1999). The sheer scale of the non-budgetary transactions at all levels, and their significance in influencing political alliances, fostered widespread international critiques of "corruption" in Russia. In response to stepped-up pressure and financial incentives from the World Bank and the IMF, the Russian government embarked on a wide-ranging plan to bring all state inputs and outputs into a single, auditable, and transparent federal budget. The gradual implementation of this Treasury System (*kaznacheistvo*) and associated audits was one of the chief items of concern and conversation among state officials I knew at all levels, from Sepoch up to the regional administration in Perm.

Conversions to Treasury accounting were staggered across the Perm Region and across units at each level of state administration. Sepoch's own complete conversion to Treasury accounting was not scheduled to take place until a year after my fieldwork, although rules and regulations for state budget expenditures had been gradually tightening since 1991. Several rules already in place stood out in state employees' complaints: non-cash expenditures were forbidden; *all* payments had to be processed through the state bank; there was no provision in the budget for gifts of any sort; no items that disappeared from inventory could be written off without evidence of where they had gone; and all transactions had to be recorded in log books that were frequently checked by higher-level Treasury officials.

At an informational meeting about the coming Treasury reform, one of Sepych's local officials asked why such a system and the multiplying accountants and bureaucrats that came with it were necessary. The answer she received was quite direct: "so there will be more control over you." "Monitoring, monitoring," muttered another state official, when I asked about the new system. In contrast to the relationships that passed through the commercial farm, the evaluation of state exchanges of salaries, patronage, and theft was often couched in *negative* terms: what was impossible, objectionable, or downright offensive, rather than in terms of what could be accomplished with a little effort. I again discuss salaries, patronage, and theft, highlighting the increasing *inability* of state officials to use their resources in ways that both they and townspeople considered useful and proper for individuals, households, and Sepych as a whole.

Theft

Theft is the easiest point at which to begin. Many of my conversations about inputs to households from various state and non-state institutions took place during conversations in the school, the library, or the local administration offices. When I asked about the importance of theft in general, I was often reminded that people usually took things only from the commercial farm, not state institutions. This configuration owed as much to the kinds of items around the workplace as to regulation or anti-corruption campaigns. As one woman who worked in the school put it, looking around her office, "What am I going to steal from here? This piece of paper?" Her husband's commercial farm job presented him with considerably more opportunities for creative inputs into their household. With the increasing demands of domestic economies, it was not the implements of state bureaucracy, culture, and education that were the most necessary and desirable.

A second set of concerns about theft from the state revolved directly around the procedures associated with new auditing reform and the strictures they placed on state employees. Many state employees resented the new demands for audit and their implication that, if left to their own devices, they would simply walk off with everything in their workplaces. The local kindergarten, under the jurisdiction of the local state administration, provides a case in point. The long-time director of the kindergarten was a vociferous critic of new auditing measures; on one occasion she used dishes as the primary example of her

dissatisfaction. In the Soviet period, she told me, the kindergarten was a unit of State Farm Sepych. If she had an inventory of 100 plates, and, in the course of the year, twenty of them were broken by the children, she would just have to go to the director and ask him to sign a statement writing off the twenty broken plates. With new auditing rules in place, if there were twenty broken plates, she would have to save the shards of each and every plate in order to show the auditor coming from Vereshchagino at the end of the year. She took exception to this lack of trust and the implicit assumption that she and her colleagues were stealing plates out from under kindergarten children's lunches. On auditing days, rather than worrying about things that might be stolen by her employees, the kindergarten director's biggest concern was to remind her staff to make sure none of their personal cups or spoons, brought in from home to temporarily replace broken ones, were left lying around. If they were, they might be counted in the audit and claimed forever as state property.

Although strict auditing procedures already applied to her inventory, they did not yet apply to the payment of fees. The director of the kindergarten often took payment from parents in potatoes or vegetables to feed the children in the kindergarten cafeteria—doing things the much preferable “Soviet way,” as she called it. Fee payments in kind allowed families to keep more cash on hand and the cafeteria to regulate its food stores, but she didn't know how long this off-the-books accounting measure would last. In this conversation and in others, state officials and employees resented the implication that they would steal. That they might have was not the point: they bridled at the implication that they did not know exactly how much it was possible to steal without undercutting their ability to do their job effectively.

Patronage

Like theft, patronage from state officials was not as high a premium as it was from the commercial farm. The local administration had no tractors, no construction materials, no grain, and few of the other items essential to the survival of domestic economies.¹² State

¹² In many local administrations where the local Soviet-era enterprise had disbanded entirely, local heads of administration had put together a “working group” (*khozgrupp*a), which usually consisted of a tractor or two, perhaps a combine, an electrician, and some plumbers. Households could pay small fees to the local administration for the use of these specialists, and the administration itself would use them to care for local infrastructure. There was no such group in Sepych; everyone appealed to AOZT Sepych for these services. I discuss the issue of infrastructure below.

officials could perhaps give small favors to friends or family members when it came to allotting land for haying or building. They could help to speed paperwork through various higher levels of bureaucracy. Their frequent trips to the city on state matters were a source of rides and favors for their employees and others, but this again counted for little. Rarely did I hear any state officials, from the head of the Sepych local administration on down, referred to in anything close to the ways in which townspeople spoke of the advantages of a connection to Andrei Petrovich or other highly-placed employees of the commercial farm.

It was, of course, precisely the aim of anti-corruption measures to staunch the flow of these kinds of favors from state officials. Although they had no brief for corruption, many of my acquaintances in state jobs thought that their higher-ups had gone just a little too far in this matter. The regulation and auditing of gifts provides a clear example of attempts to curb anything remotely resembling patronage, as well as the social consequences of these regulations. The local state administration frequently came upon situations that required the presentation of gifts. There were gifts for the oldest townspeople on the Elderly Persons' Day, token gifts at state functions such as the anniversary of the library, or gifts to the commercial farm on Agriculture Workers' Day. State employees and townspeople expected these gifts; they were in many ways the heirs Soviet "moral incentives" to labor and omnipresent decorations. The head of Sepych's local administration, however, was consistently confronted with a dilemma on these occasions: there was no money in her budget for gifts and it was practically impossible to move money around for the purchase of gifts. Frustrated, she had long since decided to simply buy gifts with her own money when official functions called for it. The situation would be even worse with the coming Treasury accounting reforms, she said to me on one occasion. Some state employees in Vereshchagino and Perm, who were already working under Treasury accounting, testified that it would indeed be still harder.

One culture worker in Vereshchagino worried for weeks and weeks in advance of the anniversary party for the House of Culture that she was not going to be able to present its career employees with flowers. Treasury system accounting meant that she was not allowed to purchase gifts from her state budget. There was a provision that allowed state agencies who brought in their own money—such as library fees for photocopying—to use some of that money for gifts. But in those cases, there was still a tax on gifts and taxes could not be

paid with money from the federal budget. As a result, I was told, the person who received the gift was technically required to pay taxes on the gift and fill out all of the appropriate paperwork. “Can you imagine that?” this culture worker said to me. It was hardly a gift, she went on, if you had to turn around and ask the person to pay some minuscule taxes on it. Another culture employee—this time in the regional center of Perm—told me, with similar barely-disguised outrage, that his office was not permitted to buy flowers for actors and actresses on opening night, even when they were distinguished guests visiting from other cities. In all of these cases, anti-corruption measures intended to eliminate the ability of state officials to give gifts—presumed to be evidence of “corruption” or influence-peddling—severely hampered the ability of state representatives to enter into moral relationships, garner trust in their jobs, or create wealth in people-style obligations that continued to be important, even if in new ways.

There were, to be sure, many types of manipulation available to get around the system. Faked receipts from trusted store employees abounded, and, particularly in small administrative units, agreements could be reached with Treasury officials to look the other way for limited purposes. There were, in the end, flowers for the House of Culture employees at their anniversary party, although all of the receipts were for different purchases. The state culture official in Perm told me that, for the opening night of their play, they had bought flowers for all of the visiting actors and counted them as set decorations (legal) rather than gifts (illegal). As one culture worker working under Treasury accounting put it, “We’re Russians. Of course we’ll find a way around it.” But her comment was offered more in resignation and weariness than in delight at her own inventiveness: the space for manipulation was getting smaller and smaller, the stakes lower and lower, and the satisfaction at getting around the system harder and harder to enjoy. It was becoming a victory to be able to present a bouquet of flowers to those who had worked in their state jobs all of their lives. The size of the obligations that resulted were approaching the point at which they were no longer worth the rights that had to be expended in making the transaction work at all.

State Salaries

State salaries formed a third vector of transactions between the state and households in Sepych. State salaries tended to be slightly higher than commercial farm salaries and, despite mid-1990s kinks in their distribution, were paid on time and in full during the time I lived in Sepych. Accounting rules, of course, prohibited the sort of flexible credit arrangements that Andrei Petrovich was able to institute in the commercial farm. However, spreading work between the commercial farm for one spouse and one or another segment of the state for the other permitted many households to spread the risk of salary shortfalls and diversify inputs into their household. For state officials, the biggest problem came from the conflict of two trends in state policy-making. On the one hand, due to high-level intentions to keep the size of the state to a minimum and hold budgets under control, lower level state officials, such as those in Sepych, had smaller complements of employees and smaller budgets than necessary. There was neither enough money nor enough staff to do all that was expected of the state with municipalization. At the same time, accounting regulations permitted transactions only in cash, which hampered state officials' ability to engage in the sorts of wheeling and dealing to accomplish tasks that were prevalent everywhere outside the state.

Consequences in Sepych

All of the state officials I knew encountered these problems; their particular configuration in Sepych was also significant. The head of administration in Sepych when I lived in town was Faina Timofeevna, a former Party member in State Farm Sepych. She had been head of administration for several years and, on a personal level, was very well liked by townspeople. However, she encountered numerous problems in doing her job in the way that she, and townspeople, would have liked. Caught in the predicaments described above, she was repeatedly put in positions that resulted in incomplete projects, dissatisfied workers, and angry townspeople. Her efforts were tireless in the circumstances, but the results were often considered unsatisfactory. This allowed the much more flexible AOZT Sepych to ride to the rescue. No longer legally obliged to care for townspeople, Andrei Petrovich could cast his assistance to the local administration as pure generosity, even more so when state officials had to ask him for help. His *increasing* wealth in people was, in part, directly premised on

Faina Timofeevna's *decreasing* ability to create obligations in townspeople. This dynamic played out on multiple fronts.

In the first place, there was the issue of gender. Elsewhere, I have discussed different expectations about the competencies of men and women in managing households (Rogers 2005). Men were usually considered to be better at making the deals and contacts that revolved around thefts, nonmonetary deals, and informal exchanges of labor. Women, on the other hand, exercised control over the household inputs and outlays of cash associated with salaries and stores. When discussing Andrei Petrovich and Faina Timofeevna, townspeople often relied on these same evaluations, with Sepych as household writ large. With increasingly tough financial controls, Faina Timofeevna needed to rely on more and more elaborate non-budget, non-cash means to accomplish the tasks of local government. These were precisely the competencies that, according to townspeople, women didn't have to the extent that men did. "It's easier for a man to make deals," (*mushchine legche dogovorit'sia*) I heard time and time again. These necessity of these deals often came up in connection with one of the main tasks of the head of administration: tending to Sepych's infrastructure.

Even before accounting reforms, there was little money in Faina Timofeevna's budget for full-time employees who could be assigned to install new streetlights or construct new sidewalks for Sepych's muddy roads. Forced to skimp, Faina Timofeevna therefore frequently relied on family and friends or hired moonlighters known for their dubious work habits. This, for instance, is how I ended up painting Sepych's town hall. Faina Timofeevna not only ran into trouble with the quality of work done by moonlighters (except me), but with frequent demands to be paid in moonshine rather than cash. With full-scale Treasury accounting still a couple of years away, she could usually finagle a way to pay her moonlighters twenty rubles in cash when they demanded a bottle at the conclusion of their work.

Similarly, the low-salaried pay for work in the furnace rooms that heated state buildings meant that these jobs were revolving doors; state officials were constantly beating the bushes for workers. State offices were sometimes left frigid in the winter because one or another temporary stoker had failed to show up for his shift. More than once I saw the Faina Timofeevna walking door-to-door late in the evening, looking for a substitute stoker. Whenever it snowed, she relied on those townspeople with access to their own tractors to

plow many of Sepych's public streets of their own good will. There was little money left in the budget and she was already in debt to the commercial farm for several tens of thousands of rubles worth of snowplowing services. In practice, she told me, the worst possible thing that happened to her administration one winter was that her son broke a rib at his job in the commercial farm. This meant that he was temporarily unavailable to do miscellaneous state jobs for free; his injury revealed just how much she relied on him for work that didn't need to be compensated from her budget. The scope of obligations and allegiances Faina Timofeevna was able to create was barely bigger than her immediate family.

In short, the head of the local state administration was caught between the shrinking size of her budget and accounting rules which permitted her only to make payouts in cash. The local administration could not, without significant manipulation, enter into the kinds of non-cash exchange relationships that people were accustomed to, expected, and found especially important in the uncertain and risky economic climate of the post-Soviet period. When full-scale Treasury accounting arrived in the coming years, Faina Timofeevna said, life would get even worse. She would no longer be able to transfer limited sums among her accounts, as she still could to a degree, and all payouts would have to be signed for and take place through the state bank rather than her office. It would be even harder to compensate moonlighters who demanded moonshine and the circumstances would require more flexibility, precisely the kind that was slowly being eroded by increased audit.

Conclusion

I conclude by bringing the two sides of my comparison together, first ethnographically and then analytically.

A Town Meeting

In November 2001, representatives from the office of the head of administration of the Vereshchagino district made their annual trip to Sepych to attend a town meeting. The meeting had several purposes. It was to begin with the yearly report of Sepych's head of administration, continue with a discussion and evaluation of her performance, and end with speeches from several candidates for office in the Perm Regional Assembly. The meeting

was held in the House of Culture, with about sixty townspeople in attendance. Faina Timofeevna's report was about ten minutes long, covering the various details of the local administration's efforts during the year and drawing particular attention to the fact that she had managed to keep all of the local administration's kindergartens running throughout the year (others across the Vereshchagino district had to close for months a time for lack of funds).

After her report, the criticisms began. The townspeople who stood to speak focused their criticisms on infrastructure. The fall had been particularly rainy and muddy and the lack of planks for sidewalks in even the muddiest sections of town was a repeated item of complaint. Others talked about how dark Sepych was at night; how could there not be better care taken of the streetlights? Several speakers went from lack of sidewalks and streetlights to what they saw as the heart of the problem: Faina Timofeevna didn't find ways to work around things when there were obstacles. She didn't "get out there and talk to people," or "get people together." Toward the end of the evaluation period, Andrei Petrovich was invited to take the floor. He did, saying that he agreed with criticisms about the roads, sidewalks, and streetlights, which, he reminded townspeople, had not been taken care of for years and were no longer his problem. He implicitly compared AOZT Sepych to the local administration: "We take care of our own [in the commercial farm]," he said, "and we can't take care of everything else too." This was now the job of the state; he was just the local CEO. Nevertheless, he went on to say that he would be glad to help—if Faina Timofeevna invited him to any meetings, which, he noted, she hadn't. (She was already well in debt to the director and the farm.)

The tone of the conversation, then, was very much about who had the ability to collect people and motivate people in order to get things done. At the conclusion of this part of the meeting, the representative from the district-level head of administration's office called for a vote. For the first time in her seven year tenure as head of administration, Faina Timofeevna's work was judged "unsatisfactory" by a margin of 19 to 12, with 11 abstentions (among them Andrei Petrovich) and the rest of those present sitting on their hands. The representative from Vereshchagino began his response by saying that the answer was not to "get rid of people" but to "work better." He asked Faina Timofeevna to remain in her post and try to work harder the next year.

The unsatisfactory vote on Faina Timofeevna's work as head of administration that year was heavily overdetermined. Factors included the weakness of local administrations from the get-go and the lack of resources in the local administration. These issues were nearly as old as postsocialism itself in Sepych. It is difficult to say what effect the new anti-corruption reforms and audits had in creating the conditions that led to the vote of unsatisfactory in that one year. They were certainly the factors that worried Faina Timofeevna and the other state officials I knew the most, pushing them to the point where they wondered if their jobs were worth it anymore. The true measure of the meeting was perhaps in the final part, in which the candidates for the Perm Regional Assembly gave their speeches. Neither candidate was from the Vereshchagino District (the voting units in which Sepych participated for the Regional Assembly elections were much larger). Nearly everyone at the meeting thought these rural campaign swings were a charade: there was absolutely zero chance that either one of these candidates would ever return to Sepych—or do much for rural folk at all—if he were elected. The easiest way to garner a few quick votes, however, was to associate with powerful people. Indeed, the two Assembly candidates, the state representative from Vereshchagino, and Andrei Petrovich had all arrived at the meeting together. Faina Timofeevna had arrived by herself. When it was time for the candidates' stump speeches, both men worked to associate themselves with Andrei Petrovich. The first candidate concluded his speech by thanking “Andrei Petrovich, God grant him health” and, almost as an afterthought, “also your head of administration.” The second candidate began his speech by saying that he admired three people in the Vereshchagino district, Andrei Petrovich first among them.

Assumptions Revisited

In concluding, I return to some of the assumptions with which I began to show how they have informed my analysis. First, I assumed that “the state” is not an “it,” but rather a field of competing social relations at multiple scales and multiple cross-purposes. I have preferred the language of specific state officials, organizations, and agencies to that of “the state” writ large. One of the chief conflicts *within* the field of the state as I have discussed it here has been between the directive to municipalize power on the one hand and the

internationally mandated restrictions placed on the very relationships—such as gifts—that would enable state officials to consolidate power and legitimacy. Second, I assumed that expectations about the state and about state power matter, a point that I hope has come across in my discussions of the collection of wealth in people by circulating rights and obligations. The widely-held expectation that power should be amassed by accumulating wealth in people is not only a “Soviet legacy.” It is also a response to post-Soviet conditions of increasing risk, uncertainty, and reliance on domestic production (see e.g. Burawoy and Verdery 1999).

Third, I assumed no external analytic measures of what should constitute proper statehood or relationships between citizens and “the state.” Some might view Andrei Petrovich’s drive to increase his power as inappropriate interference in matters of state, or consider theft from the commercial farm as an impediment to real economic growth, or dismiss state officials’ chafing at overly zealous anti-corruption reforms as bespeaking a Soviet mindset, or, indeed, think that collecting wealth in people is a bizarre and retrograde way to organize power and legitimacy. I would disagree. The formation of and reliance on a protectionist fiefdom like AOZT Sepych seems to me an entirely appropriate and intelligent response to some of the conditions townspeople faced after 1991: a Land Codex that was held up in the Duma for over a decade as primitive accumulation and devaluation ravished the countryside; predatory banks peddling shady loans to those who tried to strike out on their own as rural entrepreneurs; no effective legal system to challenge those banks when they broke their own contracts; unpredictable bouts of demonetization and inflation; urban state officials who barely disguised their disdain for the countryside; and massively increased pressure on families to produce in their domestic economies.

Applicability and Implications

How does the case I have presented here help us understand the postsocialist state beyond Sepych? I offer two suggestions for further work, both of which I hope to incorporate into future versions of this paper.

The first concerns the post-Soviet agricultural sector and works from the differential paths to decollectivization taken across the Russian Federation. I would hypothesize, on the basis of a good deal of anecdotal information and conversations outside Sepych, that Sepych falls close to one end of a continuum stretching between, at one end, strong farm and weak

local administration and, at the other end, weak (or nonexistent) farm and strong local administration. Andrei Petrovich, in the same position for nearly three decades and with enormous respect and wealth in people carried over from the Soviet period, would overmatch any local head of administration. At the other end of the continuum would be those former state or collective farms that disbanded entirely, leaving no director at all, but only a few more well-off (and many less well-off) townspeople. In these situations, the head of administration would have a great deal more power than Faina Timofeevna. Higher-up state officials would be more likely to support his/her efforts rather than saying, as they did to Faina Timofeevna on occasion, “why do you need things from us? Sepych has Andrei Petrovich.” In the middle of the continuum would range the many struggling and more or less solvent farms that populate the vast majority of the post-Soviet countryside.

The second route to applicability is the still broader picture. I would not suggest, at least without a good deal of further thought, that the model I have developed here can be applied, template-style, to other sectors of the post-Soviet economy or state. The question is, rather, why and how has it happened that these kinds of state forms and state fields obtain in the agricultural sector and how do they interact with other state/business fields in other sectors? To whose advantage or disadvantage? How, for instance, did the Soviet organization of factory production, on the business side, and urban executive committees (*gorispolkoms*), on the state side, interact with post-Soviet forces to produce different results in the industrial sector? Ditto for the federal level. The picture that would emerge is multi-layer, ethnographically informed, picture of state-firm interactions across Russia. At the largest scale, we might then ask: What can all of this tell us about the place of states and firms in the global organization of late capitalism? Townspeople in Sepych acutely feel the global forces in which they are caught up; it should be a goal of our analysis to theorize them as well.

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