

Propaganda Photo: Land Reform in the Soviet Occupation Zone (September 1945)

Abstract

Between September 1945 and December 1948, Soviet occupation authorities carried out a sweeping land reform program in their zone. Under the motto “Junker land into farmers’ hands,” agricultural operations with more than one hundred hectares of arable land were expropriated without compensation; operations with fewer than one hundred hectares were also expropriated if the owners were identified as war criminals or Nazi activists. Newly expropriated land and existing publicly-owned land was then put into a state-owned land fund and distributed to existing small farmers, “resettlers” (i.e., refugees and people driven out of their homelands), and agricultural workers, or so-called new farmers [*Neubauern*].

About 3.1 million hectares, that is, 35% of the total arable land in the Soviet occupation zone went into this land fund, from which 2.1 million hectares were distributed to about 500,000 existing small farmers or “new farmers” within the context of land reform.

The original contemporary caption to the picture below read: “‘We’re bringing horses, the work is too hard,’ says a Red Army soldier to two female ‘new farmers’ who had hitched themselves to a plow.” Given the brutality much of the Red Army had shown – particularly toward women – when it moved into Germany and the ruthlessness it exercised during the occupation, the Soviets’ attempts to present themselves as friends and helpers of the East German population had much to overcome to come across as convincing.

Source



Source: “We are bringing horses, the work is too hard,” says a Red Army soldier to new peasant women who had harnessed themselves to the plow (original contemporary text). Unknown photographer. bpk-Bildagentur, image number 30029032. For rights inquiries, please contact Art Resource at requests@artres.com (North America) or bpk-Bildagentur at kontakt@bpk-bildagentur.de (for all other countries).

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