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I. Renchin Minjuur (1914-2007)

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Translated by Mary Rossabi
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1. Life Before Socialism and the Co-operatives

1.1. The Area of My Birthplace and My Growing Up

I. Lkhagvasuren (hereafter, IL): We are meeting with the well honored Labor Hero Mr. R. Minjuur who has been deeply involved in the *negdel*¹⁾ movement, which occupies an especially important position as our country moves into a new historical period. I will listen to you as you begin to talk about your recollections of your childhood and youth.

Renchin Minjuur (hereafter, RM): I was born in the ancient Sain Noyan Khan *aimag*²⁾, Dalai Chonkor Vangin banner, which is now Arkhangai *aimag*, Tariat *sum*, the Moron district or *bag*, and the Tooroigh area. The name Tooroigh is interesting because it is the name of a very rare tree, a few of which grew in my area. I was born in 1914, seven years before the People's Revolution. There was a private economy in Mongolia at the time of my birth, and princes and lamas held official positions dominating the monasteries and the state. Yes—there were quite a few youths who became lamas, and a few were even in charge of the herding economy. Such was our life and the state of our country. The Manchus did not build a school to educate the Mongols in modern scientific methods.³⁾ Only the Buddhist religion was studied and taught at the monasteries. If you endured a lot of hardship during your life and prayed and performed good deeds, you would be better in your next life. They were convinced of this. At the time I was born, society could be described as feudal, with a few people living affluent lives. Most people were poor and led the lives of slaves.

I was extremely poor, having been born to a single woman named Norjmaa who worked for the wealthy. I did not know my father, and a person without a father was called a bastard. I can't really determine what sort of a man my father was. My mother died from an illness when I was six years old, so I went to live with my mother's brother, Renchin, and I took his name.⁴⁾ That is why I am called Renchin Minjuur. This Renchin led a very poor life. He had no herds, and the family lived an uncomfortable life. At dawn, he went off, carrying his flintlock gun, to the steppe to hunt marmots and squirrels. Because of the wretched life this man led, after the death of my mother I too became a servant for the wealthy—such was the lot of the stray. I helped care for the chamois lambs and feed the herds, but I was not the only child with

this sort of life. Actually there were many like me in the countryside, but I was the only one in my specific area. It was especially difficult for me since I was so young when I became an orphan. Up to the age of twenty one, this was my life. There was no school to attend, and the lama at the lamasery had no interest in the education of stray children. The elder Renchin fed me, but his family barely eked out an existence.

Yuki Konagaya (hereafter, YK): Did you go hunting yourself?

RM: I went along with the elder but was frightened of the mountain streams and all the mountain foxes and wolves, yet I did shoot some animals. On the steppe, the Mongolian man manages herding his private herds, which are scattered about, and also takes care of the milking, the making of dairy products, the finding of water, and the treating of the wool and the hides. All this work offers experience and knowledge needed in such a life. Generally, we mastered such work so there was no question that further education was necessary. This was a sort of feudal system, in which only the children of the nobility could go to school, and most Mongolian children did not have such advantages. This was my situation. What did I learn in my youth? I learned how to fatten up the herds, where to go in the freezing winter, and how to prevent the elderly herds from suffering. This was what I knew. At that time when the herds and herders were ill, there was nothing to do but gather curative plants. For example, take the animal disease “mange”. All sorts of interesting plants grew in wooded areas. Some of them you could boil up with salt to make salt-marsh and cure the diseased animal by drenching his skin with this potion. So this was done.

A person could study a book from a Tibetan doctor and drink the prescribed medicine, but it did not always cure those who were seriously ill. To save the sick person, then, an exorcism was performed, and a prayer was recited, which called for the pawning of property and herds. Thus the poor suffering person became even more impoverished. So the prayer was read, and the poor had to give up even more things.

IL: Did your family herd for the rich? Were you given animals to tend for yourself?

RM: No, there was no remuneration. At that time, the average local family had between 300 and 400 sheep and 20 to 30 horses. In the desert there were more camels and in the *khangai*⁵) there were more horned cattle—perhaps 40 to 50 oxen. That size of the herds meant that a family was doing well. In such a way, we were enslaved in a family looking after the sheep and cattle. Women did the milking, and that is how food was made. Everyone in the family did such work. Generally, food and drink were free, and in winter two whole sheep and a goat were given as wages. A person who was poor had a miserable

home, drank tea for the midday meal, possessed few cattle, and wore poor clothing. In the summer rains, one wore very little. A slave had only a sheepskin for cover in the rain, and the cold of a raging storm when he sat at the bottom of a cliff. This is how the very poor lived.

YK: At that time, were crops grown in the meadows?

RM: No, though it seems strange now. At that time, the climate in Mongolia was very nice, but now there are droughts and *zuds*⁶⁾ and all things unknown. Since there was a good deal of rain, places were very green, so the herds ate well. We made the winter migration to good new quarters and entered the New Year in good condition. At the time, there were few people, families, and herds in the area, and few people were poor. There were, however, several private property owners, including the ecclesiastical and secular folk, who employed servants and under whose protection the poor became their servants for life. The diet of the average rich family I mentioned included spirits, *airagh*,⁷⁾ meat, and milk.

IL: Could you speak about going on the migrations or moving pastures and the methods of fattening up the herds?

RM: At the time there was plenty of fresh water to drink in the pastures and few people and animals. We lived life at our own pace, since both the people and their herds were free. Our winter quarters where the herds went to fatten up were near the places in which we spent the spring, summer, and autumn.⁸⁾ The summer was spent in a pleasant place, and in the winter we went to quarters where there was little snow. When the weather was most severe, the herds stayed close together and were not far away as they are today. Some people took their animals to a ravine and others moved farther away, so the animals were in good condition for the New Year. In those days, moving the pastures was not such a big deal, nor was there the problem of cutting the hay and shearing the wool.

1.2. The Chinese Trader

In our land, there were several Chinese traders but few trading companies. The Chinese trader bought our marmots, squirrels, foxes, wolves, mushrooms, etc. The herders had no cashmere because in the shearing process they didn't know, by and large, how to comb the goats or gather the hair that the yaks had shed. Much of the hair and wool from the herds had to be collected from the pastures. Some of it we made into felt that the Mongolian people used to cover their *gers*.⁹⁾ Felt was not made continuously but in a year a large amount of felt would be made for the *ger* covers, so no more was needed for several years. But ropes and tent cords were twisted from the wool or animal hair. In addition, cow or ox skins were treated. Now, however, instead of these

curried skins oilcloth, linoleum, or a carpet is laid down. Nevertheless, beautiful colored rope, bridles, halters, toggles, and saddle straps were made from the ox skins. At that time, leather straps were needed for packing loaded carts. And the so-called *khoom*, which was part of the headdresses of some Mongolian girls, was made from the hair and wool beaten into felt.

Since there was not a constant demand for the herds' hair and wool, remainders were left behind. The hair of the goats was not combed, so cashmere was disappearing, and there was no shed hair or hair at all from the oxen. The hair that kept growing on those animals was abandoned in the pastures. There was no demand for horse hair, and the horses' manes grew ever so long. Because we didn't touch their hair or wool, the herds grew healthy and fat and were often wild and more than fierce. Horses had to be broken in before being ridden and in case of falls were trained near home. Yaks and oxen were needed to carry the loads during the migration and were harnessed to carts.

Horses were seldom ridden in the wooded area or *khangai*, where it was very mountainous. And people actually went on foot in the mountains, and a horse was not used to herd the sheep. Once I turned twenty-one, I joined the military, learned to ride a horse, and began studying how to read and write. At that time, the Mongolian people were well behaved, polite, and patient. They did not drink spirits and wine, nor did they party a lot. "Danshig Naadam" (a sports festival performed in honor of the Jebtsumdambaa Khututkhu¹⁰) is still talked about today. For us so far away in the *khangai*, it is not always known that we country people rode gentle horses, played, and enjoyed ourselves in our own "Danshig Naadam." Then the time arrived for the major religious activities at the monasteries to honor Maidar (Maitreya).¹¹ People worshipped the Buddhist Maidar, assembled at the *ger* where the prayer was read, and received a blessing.

IL: What did the children and the adults eat and drink?

RM: The children ate yoghurt and drank the residue left after the distillation of *airagh*. A lot of time has passed since I was born, and I know that I am at least eighty or maybe even eighty-seven years old but I don't know. The residue from the distillation of the koumiss is *tsagaa*, or boiled yoghurt, which is sometimes called *aartz*, the residue from the whey. One drinks this boiled yoghurt which has been strained. A dried milk residue is also made from boiled milk. These dairy products are not sold in the marketplace but are made to be eaten with boiled meat. There was little flour or grain, and we had little to sell in the market. What we had, we ate and drank. The Chinese merchants did not generally have dairy food.

YK: Did the Chinese merchants come every day?

RM: There were a few Chinese merchants near the lamaseries, and there were 700 lamaseries in Mongolia. In all the ravines, there were lamaseries, and in my Mörön area, there were “The Bayanjargalan lamasery” and “The Dashland temple,” both situated in the Mörön ravine. There was a Chinese merchant near there, and he was in the stone business, as the Mongolians called it. Old Renchin sold fox, wolf, and marmot skins to the stone trader who traded in return a bit of rice and flour. I don’t know where the trader came from, but he went to the Bogd lamasery with his goods in a cart with five to ten oxen. He carried things and came and went, and one did not always know where. A rich family bought 10 *jin* of flour at one time, which would last for a year, while others bought very little—maybe 1 or 2 *jin*. We were very poor, so we bought no flour or grain. During the celebration of Maidar, a prayer was read in the home of rich families who ate food made from flour. During that time, a little food was served on the palm of one’s hand, and it tasted so good. Lamas and adults ate both dairy products and meat from bowls. *Khailmag*, a dairy product made from cream, and cream were not eaten by the poor and the servants. The liquid residue in the *airagh* fermentation pot was a white liquid, and its name had the double meaning “to drink *airagh*” (curds or koumiss) and “to work as a servant.” This residue, which was not considered real food, was given to the poor to drink, and such was the life of a poor worker. Nowadays, migrants or vagrants are called *Tsagaatch*. Let me add that this white residue was very strong, so whey and milk had to be mixed with it, but the so-called *Tsagaatch* thought such food and drink was standard.

When poor children went to look after the sheep, they collected the many mushrooms that grow in our country. A few of these mushrooms were cut up, and others were strung. At this time, sheep wool was spun into thread that was used by the women for sewing. We don’t have this kind of thread nowadays. Camels’ wool was also made into thread and used in the same way. After the cows were eaten, their sinews were made into thread for boots and for sewing fur on a *deel*.¹²⁾ We made the thread from these cow sinews ourselves, and we also dressed the sheepskins and the *deels* ourselves. We made the thread ourselves and tanned and curried the sheepskins ourselves and then made all our own clothes.

We wore sheepskin trousers and sheepskin *deels*. The wealthy wore cotton and silk *deels*, and the lamas wore yellow or red *deels*. Poor children had made sheepskin *deels*, with all the hair removed, which was called a gown of “hairless skin.” They always wore a hairless skin *deel* and hairless skin trousers. Cured ox hide was called *khom*, which meant “dressed hide,” and it was made into boots with the sole made of felt. The poor had neither cotton nor silk at the time, so we never wore clothes made from these fabrics,

and I never wore them until I was twenty-one. When it was warm, I didn't wear boots and went barefoot. In the winter I wore a fur *deel* and boots from dressed hide. Such was life.

YK: Did the Chinese stone merchant speak Mongolian?

RM: He was able to speak Mongolian like a Chinese. Maybe he spoke Inner Mongolian, but I don't know. He did business by speaking Mongolian. I think that he had two or three servants, as there were always two or three Chinese youths near him who were called *shushmai* (i.e., the Chinese in Mongolia), and they came to families to buy the pelts of wild animals and the mushrooms we had gathered. The stone trader took these things and traded them for *tanzuur* (a type of cake), black and red plums, and brown sugar. He gave us lumps of brown sugar that were small and came in a square bundle. These were traded along with Chinese tea and Chinese pipe tobacco. He also traded our mushrooms for a limited amount of ribbon thread that was swirled and painted and felt rather solid and silky. We traded mushrooms for other things too. It was good to have a skirt full of mushrooms, but the cakes we got just covered the palm of the hand. We always wore leather straps as belts, since it was rare to own a cotton belt and whatever I traded I put into an inside breast pocket.

1.3. The Methods of Herding

Why do the herds always pre-occupy us? When eating, drinking, putting on clothes—they are always on our minds as they provide us with everything. I am a professional herder. I know how to tan cowhide, how to make milk products, and how to watch the herds using all my strength. At that time, herding was very demanding. I drove the cattle that had to be put out to pasture, but where were these pastures? We had to answer that question. It is not right to drive cattle in the dark of the night under a sky with a thousand stars. I soothed the herds and tried to get them to lie down. So I started to count 1, 2, 3 stars and when I saw exactly 100 stars I let the cattle stand up, and then I could go home. If I arrived before counting 100 stars, I would be scolded. That was in winter when there were no watches. Morning came early, so we could go to the pastures with the herds when the sun came up, and we would take them in when we counted 100 stars. The sheep returned earlier at dusk. Both the cows and the horses came back later in the evening.

At that time, little well water was available. Each ravine in the *khangai* had some water, so I could water our small herds in our own area. Since there were few watering places, we didn't always know where to go. There had been water in our winter encampment but not in our summer area. Now, there is none. Nature has changed since I was a child, and in the last eighty years

things have been different. Since the structure of nature has changed, winter and summer seasons have also changed. The rainfall comes or doesn't come, and that changes what we eat and drink. That was my life when I was young.

IL: Did the rich families get a lot of milk from their sheep?

RM: A lot of milk from the sheep. At that time, people were greedy about getting milk from their animals. Cows were milked in the morning and twice in the evening and sometimes the sheep were milked three times a day—once before going to the pasture, and again in the afternoon and the evening though the lambs were permitted to feed then too. During the day, the sheep and the lambs were kept apart in the summer. After the evening milking, the suckling lambs were fenced in preparation for weaning. Tending these lambs was demanding, so we combined our sheep and lambs with our neighbors' animals and camped close to one another. The milking period was short—three months in the summer and the rest of the year there was no milking. There was, therefore, no surplus.

IL: How far did you herd the sheep each day?

RM: It wasn't too bad. Not too far—about ten kilometers in all directions. The winter, spring, and fall quarters were not too far away. We loaded the ox carts to accommodate us as we moved to the winter quarters. Generally, the winter quarters were within a circle of seven to ten or perhaps even twenty kilometers.

IL: Did you change your winter quarters, and did the winters differ from place to place?

RM: At that time the government administration assigned the winter, but not the spring, quarters. We were given the Tooroi winter quarters, and one did not argue with the government. Other families also adapted to spending the winter in the Tooroi, the Artzatinkh, and the so-called mid-mountain pass winter quarters, which were near each other. By law, I could not let my herds enjoy all three of these places. All three areas followed the older brother system and helped each other out.

Actually, those days were nice because there were few quarrels and little gossip, and the youth and adult children had great respect for their elders. They were well behaved and when an adult entered a house, the younger people stayed outside with the herds in the nearby *khashaa*.¹³⁾ Later they entered but there were no crowds—just the family. One had to sit by the stove, and where one sat was important. Now people sit among all the stuff on the bed. We always knelt. In Japan they also kneel. That is the way we sit.

At the time the elders gave things to the children. There were no china bowls, so we had to use wooden bowls. The merchants came by with tiny wooden bowls. Everything was made of wood, and we didn't have metal or ceramic spoons and forks. The spoons were made from willow wood, and the

bowls were not perfect, so it was best not to put too much in them. Each family scraped the residue of the boiling milk from the cooking pot, and it was then said: “Give me your hand, and I will put something in it. Forget the bowls.”

Children did not taste spirits or *airagh*. Such food was revered. The children saw it, but did not drink it, and they did eat the meat from the head, shin, stomach, and offal of the sheep and the goats. They were also given the hard shin bones and the marrow bones. The shoulder blades, the pelvic bones, and the thigh bones were enjoyed by the adults. If the children ate these, they would be considered rude. In summer, almost no meat was eaten. Even the wealthy put out their herds in summer, did not eat meat, and ate mainly dairy food.

YK: Did people eat marmots?

RM: They did eat marmot meat, especially the poor who also ate squirrel, stag, and doe. Squirrels were very plentiful and were hunted a lot. The Chinese traders paid a lot for the squirrels and their hides. Children ate squirrel meat which tastes like tree sap and I don’t know how they could eat it. Marmot meat has been eaten for ages, but the good meat was not given to the children who only got the head. The entrails were mixed with onions, and the children were only given a taste. Maybe we didn’t get stomach aches because we ate so little.

The children were not given tea to drink but instead they drank boiled water mixed with a little milk to make “a cloudy mixture.” When a man married, he received black tea from his wife, which she drank when she married. The rich drank this tea but unmarried women did not drink this black tea, nor did poor children. Movies have been made about the lives of the super rich, and recently a film was made about the children of the Chinese Emperor. I can see these children were spoiled and ignorant and had neither culture nor schooling.

I have no memories of droughts and fodder shortages during my childhood. There were no droughts. There was always rain in the summer, and in winter there was snow. Now from time to time, there was a lot of snow. That is how I recall it. Sometimes there were terrible downpours and floods. One family that was punished by the gods was washed away in a flood as it worried about its herds. Because of the great noise, lightning, and torrents of rain, these thunder storms have been called “hanging dragons,” and they are mentioned a great deal in legends. There were also tornadoes with great winds.

It has long been a custom to worship at the *oboo*,¹⁴⁾ and there are a great many *oboos* in the country. On every hillock there are stone *oboos*, but in my area of the country there is only one—the *jinstiin oboo*. One worships at the

oboo once a year. Many lamas worshipped there and when we were little we would run races and wrestle there. Those children who won received prizes of a big cheese made from raw milk, as well as the skin from the boiled milk. In the autumn, one generally worshipped at one particular *oboo*.

Mountain water was greatly respected and so was spring water which we collected in a bucket, even if one had to go far. But one could not wash one's arms and legs in the water buckets for fear of enraging the "local deities." No one did this. However, one could wash in other vessels, but washing water had to be separated from the stream, and this water could not be mixed with milk. Buddhism existed alongside nature worship, and one always said such prayers to nature:

"Bless the spirit of my country! Bless my rich *khangai*!
Bless my whole world."

A sprinkled offering of milk and tea was offered with the prayer.

IL: Did the old people teach the younger people how to find the plants that their animals liked to eat?

RM: They talked about that a lot and from the elders we learned where to take the sheep, horses, and cows. The sheep and goats fattened up on the leaves and flowers, grass, wormwood, wild leek, and Mongolian onion, so one herded the sheep to places where these good plants were found. The cows and horses were not taken to the same areas as the sheep. The sheep did not like to lie down for a long time near the edge of the river. The cows and horses were herded to places far into the mountains where coarse grass grew. The sheep were pastured apart from the cows and horses. The children cried "Hey! We are going with the cows and sheep to the pastures!" as they walked along.

There was only hard work and no time to sit comfortably while herding. There was the mating of the cows, and when the calves arrived, the milking had to be arranged. The lambs and sheep needed care and after milking the sheep they had to be let out. The herds had to be kept erect to drink and could not lie down, so there was no time for me to sit. However, when you are young you become less tired. One can rest and sleep at night. I spread out the treated skin of a two year old calf to sleep on. Sheepskin or goat skin is soft. During the day, about fifty skins were put on the ground to sit on. At night the skins were turned inside out, so the hair was upwards, and one folded a *deel* on the top of this skin. There was no space to stretch out one's bent legs as one managed to squeeze into the folds. Since there was no other covering, sometimes one's feet stuck out and got cold even when the legs were bent. However, this helped in preventing pain in the knees and the feet.

Now when I sit down I always have something soft to rest my feet and knees on. I don't really know how to rest my painful feet. Perhaps by sitting

on a soft chair or nice divan or in a comfortable car? Why do feet hurt so fast? We curl up to sit and to sleep—yes we do—so we must have proper bedclothes and bedding.

IL: How was the calving period regulated at that time?

RM: The herders regulated it themselves. Our area was divided into 3 zones: desert, *khangai*, and steppe. The pastures were also divided according to the area. Life went on around the clock. The sun affected how the herds ate, made milk, and grew skins that were good for tanning. The sun also made everything happy including the herds which were put in the *khashaa* to sleep. Poor people had no animals, and even when I reached twenty-one, I had no herds. Even now I have none, but I understand the ways of herding, although I did not learn herding from taking care of my own herd. Even if a person does not have his own herds, if he is near them, he will not starve.

YK: How did you separate the flocks when you watched other peoples' herds? How were the animals apportioned?

RM: The children tended the sheep, while the cows and horses were tended by the rich people themselves. The very capable people rode horses, while the weaker folk were assigned to take care of the sheep. In this way, everyone participated in herding and in the everyday chores.

YK: Was the whole family involved in moving pastures with the sheep?

RM: The burden was shared, and the servants moved together with everyone else on the migration. There were ten families in a camp that relied on the encampment as its base. The members had to find places in the many *gers* that were brought to the *ger* camp. Four or five families with children made up one camp, which did not move at the height of mid summer and stayed in one place to milk the herds. Many family camps came together in their winter quarters. Making food and drink in the winter was sort of like playing a game, and many games were played by the older people, especially at night. Throughout their lives, good natured families got together to play. We children were curious and sat at the foot of the stove, while the adults played ankle bones, and we children played race horse.

Men took turns at night in the *ger* entertaining every one with interesting stories—one about a distinguished man. In the evening families returned to their *gers* and ate the meat and, in fact, almost all the food so there was little left over. Butter was made at this time, and the children hoped a lot would be prepared, so they could eat a lot. A blood pudding made from a mixture of small pieces of cut up meat was eaten with one family before moving on to another. This was my life story. At that time I was not involved in studying.

YK: Would you talk a little about the birthing of the herds in the spring?

RM: Most herds were born in the spring. Each area depended on nature and a

water supply. There was no official period for fattening the animals, and each decision was reached on its own terms. Some families birthed their animals close to each other, while others spaced them later, but all came in the spring. There was a later time that was warmer for the birthing of the animals. In the *khangai* each family had a *khashaa* for its winter quarters with an eaved roof and stalls. Families did not join their privately owned herds in one enclosure so each family built its own *khashaa*. However, in the morning, they would drive their animals side by side, and a few would join their herds together and take turns watching them. At dusk, the sheep went to their *khashaas* for the night. In the best of times, there were no thieves. In fact, there were few in the country. If a sheep wandered off from the flock, an announcement was made to this effect: “One of my sheep has gone!” “What is the information?” “Ooh, it left the *khashaa* and was grey colored with a white patch on its forehead.” One family generally did not exploit another family’s sheep. Another announcement could be made that the sheep was mating or it could be said: “Our cow mated, and there is a black two year old calf.” “Was the calf missing?” might have been asked. Since there were no thieves and since this was not a person, maybe the animal missing was indeed mating! From that vantage point, honesty was the best policy.

IL: Is there a loss of life for the young animals if the birthing period is moved to the late spring?

RM: There certainly is loss, but the skins from the dead lambs were used to make lambskin *deels*. How many animals perished up until now? How many grew up? There is no number and no one has enquired about this. The deaths of the females were not recorded, although many of the young were lost. Little attention, however, was paid to those that did not grow up. It was pointless for each family to record those numbers. Sometimes, however, there was a number. Now, especially with the national archive, people have a reason for an annual count of their herds. It can be determined from the archives if the State should make up to those who suffered a loss of their animals.

In 1937-1938, many people were framed and executed. One can study the archives of the time to determine how many there were. So, too, must the number of animals have a place in the archives, but I don’t remember the number of animals I had.

1.4. The Herding Business

IL: Do the herders sell animals among themselves?

RM: A herder does engage in trade, and business and herds are exchanged. At that time money was in use. Animals were cheap—on average, a sheep cost seven silver coins. A cow or large animal sold for twenty. That is very little

money. The rich people traded two types of horses: the ambler and the slow moving ambler. Their children liked to decorate and ride on the ambler, and the fast horses were promoted for racing. But there were no horse races at our local *naadam*.¹⁵⁾ There were questions later. My area was remote, and the monastery was as far away as the Tsaatan area.¹⁶⁾ There were no horse races on the ice there for fear of harming someone. And although the horses were fast, they did not race. Thus we only did business in ambler, sheep, cows, and horses. But just a little at that. “So, let’s say I buy a male sheep (wether) from you!” was the given example. “For six or seven silver dollars,” which today is equal to a hundred dollars. However, it is hard to do business now for one hundred silver dollars since in winter a lot of meat is needed. “So I will buy two or three sheep.” This is what was said. Only later were the animals herded to the city to be traded.

YK: Did the stone trader buy any animals?

RM: Not to trade—only to eat.

YK: The Mongolian eats dairy products at certain times. Does each family in your area prepare the dairy products?

RM: We prepare a lot of dairy because we eat a lot, especially since we have no flour or grain. The clotted cream and food made from it are stored in vessels made from animal skins. The butter fat is made in a cowhide vessel called a *khongio*. Those vessels were so large that they equaled fifty or a hundred canisters. The dried cheese curd milk residue was first put in a treated sheep or goat skin bag called a *tolam* before being dried on a screen. Thus, we used both the *tolam* and the *khongio* in processing our dairy products.

1.5. Local Carpenters and Craftsmen

In the old days, the Mongolian smith and carpenter were both quite prosperous and well skilled. Metal coins were generally made by the smiths, and carpenters made the wooden chests and vessels including those for *airagh* and some fats. Wooden buckets were made from all sorts of natural woods. The smiths made the knives, scissors, locks, and latch and latch plates. The smiths did not live in the lamasery but traveled and lived with the herders. Our elder brother Renchin lived alone in a shed and worked as a smith. A man could also live as a carpenter, and our area was famous for carpenters. The great royal *stupa*¹⁷⁾ banner, as it was called, had the most celebrated craftsmen in the area. I don’t know where the iron came from which was used for metal knives and locks. There were also silver smiths who made elegant ornamentation for the decorations for the caps of women’s headdresses. Mongolia does not have silver, so perhaps it came from abroad. In one *sum*, there were three or four smiths and four or five carpenters. They all had talent which they could

pass on to their children.

At the time, a smith and a carpenter, who were gifted craftsmen, did not study or go to school but learned their trade on their own. A talented hunter was a student of the hunt and was respected. The Mongolian smiths made flintlock guns, but now there are no such huge guns.

YK: How did the life of the hunter or carpenter differ from that of the ordinary herder? Could one possibly distinguish the carpenter, hunter, or smith from the outside?

RM: Yes, because they were famous in their locality. A good carpenter, a good smith, and a good hunter were all famous. Now people have not heard of smith Banjil or carpenter Ishdagva or carpenter Adaii who built temples near other buildings. Our area was famous for its more than ten carpenters. Herders, even though they had many animals, did not have that notoriety. Instead of herders working for the wealthy, they could be carpenters and smiths. The rich paid the carpenters and smiths to herd, but they could always sell off some of their animals and reduce the herds. Each group had full rights to buy and trade, and one's own employment and trade were not connected. Business was not forbidden, and everything could be traded. Our country was poor because business had not been that successful. Mr. Ishdagva tells this story:

“A man said: ‘Please make me a wooden bucket.’ The carpenter replied: ‘Sure, I will make you two buckets!’ The carpenter would take several nights to make this bucket, of course, by hand. First, the wood had to be tempered and bent into shape until the bucket was made to use in tending the sheep. Then the carpenter had to slaughter the sheep for food, but he did not have his own herds. He had all sorts of work to do, and of course most of life is work. Few people can live only by hunting, carpentry, or doing metalwork. Only the lamas as a group could live like that. But they lived as parasites and did not make a living from herding. Instead, they sat in their monasteries and meditated without interruption and they were given the things they needed. They had a bag with all their clothes in it. That's all I have to say.”

YK: When you were twenty-one, did you join the Mörön squadron?

RM: Yes, I did. A person does not go very far in life without learning. I had regarded the Zaya saint at the Tariat monastery and the Shireet saint as examples. But when I went there, I did not find such learning. Who knows where it can be found?

1.6. The Book I Wrote

YK: Did your life change when you reached twenty-one?

RM: Yes—a person has by then set out on a path. I wrote a book in 1983 that was an autobiography called *Biography of a Life*. I was one of the few in my

family who could write. Many people had written things before me but I had written little. I had suggested many titles and had quite a few pictures.

IL: A brief glance at the table of contents shows the following:

An inscription from the heart
Life at first hand
Wool preparation
My family
With no definite outcome
Be generous in your giving
The call of the party is my goal
The reins guide the steed's direction
Bless the mainland
A place to sacrifice to the sky
The head of the herd has a grey blaze on its forehead
The fate of our children is first

RM: My life is encompassed in these chapters.

At twenty-one, I was called up to the military and found military service most interesting. I served in Dornod *aimag* in the fifth division at Bayantumen near Choibalsan city. Mongolia had a big military base there to prevent attacks from the Japanese-Chinese military. The service at Bayantumen was for three years.

When I was six years old, I had stood on the *arghal*¹⁸⁾ basket and said: "Mother—is there land even farther away from here?" And mother said: "Of course there is a lot of land far away from here." I remember this conversation very well. When we used to go to our Tooroi winter quarters near the ravine, I could not imagine that there was any more land, and we went there on foot because there were no roads. Mongolia is called a strange country, and there have been lots of interesting articles about me recently, and it is interesting to read about oneself. Perhaps this information could be useful. There was something written about me when I was awarded "The Golden Soyombo," which obliged me to open my files so to speak. Three of us were herding heroes—I. D. Avarzed, T. Namjig, and I. We were heroes because of certain things that we had done and events that befell us. One can read about these events and learn from them. One title, for example, is "Rest is unfamiliar to me." However, after I reached twenty-one, I was able to rest a bit because I sat in an office, talked with people, did written work, and made decisions about combating the *zud* and the droughts and how people would migrate with their herds. In due course, people do get a chance to rest. Today people talk about being so tired and never resting. Even at twenty-one, my life was difficult and remained so. Now I am eighty-nine, and for more than sixty years

I have worked for this country. In fact, for sixty-six years, I was not sick and remained healthy because my life was full of jollity and enjoyment, joking and drinking with little loose living. We were working for this thing called socialism. For me, Minjuur, I didn't mind having very little, and I could not have imagined an elegant house or *khashaa* or *ger*. Actually, we fought for the development of the Mongolian motherland and hoped everyone would have a better life. The Party urged us "to be strong now," and we strove toward that goal. I was healthy, so had no illnesses and few worries. However, in Mongolia, venereal disease had spread to many places. When someone became ill with this disease, pressure was put on the blood supply for the chronically ill. In addition, all sorts of food and drink could cause illness, especially when one was run down. I have never been ill in this way. I have never smoked and do not know the ill effects of drinking. The poor have no money for all of this, and in time everyone will be equal.

There are a few poor people now, and most people do not live extravagantly. We have many children. There are two of us with nine children. Four families do not live well together, and making an enclosed home in the *ger* district is difficult. I divided up the four or five sheep that I killed. I only have a three room flat, and my pension, small as it is, does not cover my expenses. The poor who have many children suffer, but what is there to do? That is a painful thought. The Party and the government leadership must speak. My *negdel* had many people who now ride in cars. There was also a store, a restaurant, and people engaged in all sorts of trade. But we have no power—for the poor, it is always the same and is now as it always was. For many years, it was quite productive to talk about life in Mongolia but now, apparently, such talk has stopped, and the opportunity has been lost. Maybe later there will be more talk about this.

YK: It is now noon, and it was very good to talk with you this morning. I haven't heard such an interesting account. Although there are many adults to talk to, one can't be as specific and direct as I was with you. Thank you.

1.7. My Star Medal

RM: I received an invitation for my eightieth anniversary (birthday). I had a sparkling star medal pinned on me, but there were no photographers, an awkward situation.

YK: Can you explain how the star medal is awarded?

RM: The so-called star goes to the Labor Hero who is awarded "The Golden Soyombo," and after that there is "The Sükhbaatar Star" with Sükhbaatar's¹⁹ picture on it. Then comes "The Meritorious Red Flag of Labor Star" and then the "Order of the Polar Star"—three stars. After that, there is a battle medal,

one of which is for the war of liberation in which I participated forty-five years ago. Then there is the “Honored Labor Medal” award with Mongolian script written on it. There are also anniversary medals for the twenty-fifth, thirtieth, fiftieth, seventieth, and eightieth anniversaries. There is also a medal for “The Educator who takes care of the Youth,” and this is awarded to a labor leader who organizes the youth. In addition, there are all kinds of medals for the military star medals for Khalkhin Gol.²⁰⁾ The big award of “Cultural Leader” went to a herder who had worked for twenty-one years on the *negdel* and with the youth. If one worked for ten years in the Ministry of Internal Affairs before the [Second World] War, one received a badge which read “Honored Chekist”²¹⁾ for the good work in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Another badge read “Senior Party Figure.” Thus there were many star medals and special badges. There was also a celebration for the tenth anniversary of the success of the *negdel* movement. At the time there were generally three big anniversaries:

1. The tenth anniversary for the reclamation of the virgin lands
2. The tenth anniversary for the success of the *negdel* movement
3. The tenth anniversary of Mongolian industry

These three major movements resulted from the People’s Revolution. There were only two labor heroes at the tenth anniversary celebrating the success of the *negdel* movement. In Övörkhongai *aimag*, Bogd *sum*, Ts. Maan, the camel herder, and I were those two labor heroes. I was the *negdel* leader, and he was the camel herder, and we both were awarded the titles of Labor Heroes.

2. The Formation of the Socialist Co-operatives

RM: Around noon, I will talk to you about my childhood and the area I lived in before joining the military. Approaching twenty-one, a person becomes a bit wiser, and I wondered how I was actually going to live. I needed support and was interested in learning to drive, but little attention was paid to me, so fulfilling my military service at twenty-one seemed attractive. In fact, that was a sensible plan, and I was called up for service in 1935 anyway. I was assigned to the local Bayantumen seventh division of the horse relay, even though I was a poor rider which, with great difficulty, I overcame and went to Dornod *aimag*, with more than forty local men, and on to Bayantumen, then through Ulaan Baatar to Ondorkhan and then to the Khangai area. This was the very first time I had left home and gone so far away, and there was so much to see.

2.1. Life in the Military

I was in Ulaan Baatar city for the first time, and I saw the Bogd

Monastery, and nothing else but a place without trees and mountains. I rode for more than ten days on this horse trip and sometimes I even went on foot without a horse. We were received by the leaders when we arrived and were given water and military clothes, so in that way more than one thousand men were turned into soldiers. The leaders lined up all these new soldiers, and I was among the three hundred healthy, agreeable, and active men who were selected to attend the military school for non-commissioned officers. Another three hundred men chose to go into military commanding. At the Kerülen market, chairs were placed in the bush, and the “book teacher” set up a metal board on which he would ask us to read them. I read 1 as an A, and out of our class of three hundred, only seven or eight knew how to write. At that time, 90% of the population could not write, including those going into the military. We were given five types of lessons or “the Five Mongolian notebooks.” We learned about Mongolia and the scale of its territory and the number of its lakes and water sources. We learned the number of *aimags* and *sums* as well as the number of herds. There were lessons about the government, as well as riding lessons, shooting lessons, and lessons in military tactics. After three months of reading and writing Mongolian, I had become familiar with the script and was almost writing the letters—even the ancient Mongolian script. I received an education in the military and up to now that is my life. I learned a lot in the military including:

How to shoot a gun;

How to ride a horse well and jump over obstacles;

How to cut willow rods with a sword;

And how to saddle, water, wash, and rub a horse down.

I also learned how to dismantle and reassemble a gun, to run and shoot, sit and shoot, and other sorts of shooting. I always received excellent grades in the government courses, and I can recite them by heart. After six or seven months, I was a non-commissioned officer. Non-commissioned officers commanded thirty soldiers. Exercises and classes were set up for these thirty soldiers. I worked with all of them and directed their studies. Three years passed in this way, and I received a lot of praise. A good leader has a good reputation, and my platoon was good and hard working, and each member scored well on his tests of hygiene. There were, however, differences between those of us who entered the military poor and those who came from wealth. We enjoyed improved appearances and well being, while the children of the rich were sad because they had to eat and drink food that they did not like and wear strange clothes. At the same time, our elderly, beset with worries, found themselves in difficult situations.

The soldiers wore white cotton cloth shirts, dark green trousers, an over

jacket, and felt boots in winter and an overcoat and black boots in summer as well. In winter, a fur *deel* and a fur hat were worn. Having been poor, I had never seen such clothes, so I was pleased with them. A leader had to study hard to advance to an officer. There were some cultural aspects of our school, but looking back on those times, military life seemed difficult. This was in great part because there was no housing. We used cloth tents in the hot summer, and in the frigid winter we constructed mud huts to live in on the white steppes. We could do nothing else. The soldiers rested in the *sum* and the town districts. The water from the Kerülen River was bad, and soldiers who drank it became sick to their stomachs, and many even died. The newspaper stated that the strange enemy causing illness and even death was the drinking water. I am not sure, but it could be that forty men from our area went out and only thirty returned—ten died. Certainly life in the military was hard. The food could be bad, and the clothes were strange, so we had to be taught to accept them. Although all new things seem scary, I learned a lot having been through those times. Although the military made me stronger, nowadays I could not live like that.

At my own request, I was demobilized from the military. Since I had been promoted to the rank of platoon leader, I had to persuade the other leaders. Then I thought to myself “What am I thinking?” After my mother died, I was all alone like a poor orphan, and my Uncle Renchin looked after me. I wondered how he was and imagined that he was frail and growing old. In one winter, both my mother and my father died, and there was a good lama in my area. My mother was from the north and had not been interested in the lama’s prayers. She died from a painful illness, and the lama could not give her herbal medicines to drink. Nor did he read the service for the sick. The lamas had no pity for the poor and seemed to care only for the rich. All of this was very much on my mind and, since I had been demobilized, I went to the Arkhangai *aimag* Party committee and registered as a Party member. That is how I became an adult. I was counted among the people who knew the script, and I became a Party member as a soldier, and I was highly valued. I thought I could do official work but went to work as a herder in the countryside. At the time, I had no wife or children. Then the *aimag* Party committee assigned me to work as a post carrier on the relay. I had worked hard all my life, and this difficult job was right for me.

2.2. Postal Representative

There are 49 *sums* in Arkhangai *aimag* and the 13th *sum* is in the Tariat area. At the time, Tosontsengel was the northernmost *sum* in Arkhangai, but now Tosontsengel *sum* is in Zavkhan *aimag*. Thus, the 13 *sums* are between

the two. The “representative” carried mail to these 13 *sums*, and on the relay he had 13 pack horses and 6 attendants who gave out the mail. For each *sum*, there was one pack horse. “The People’s Right” magazine and “The Party Agitators’ Handbook” were among the several newspapers and journals which were put in our horses’ saddlebags, along with the official mail for the *sum*. Twice a month, I went on the relay for 15 days to the 13 *sums* and gave out the mail and then returned with the post from the *sums*. We rode at night, slept six hours, and galloped our horses, all of which was especially hard to do in winter. I did this for more than a year.

During that year, I was summoned by the *aimag* Party committee, which praised me as a fine man, and the leader ordered a promotion for me. Burd *sum* made me its Party cell leader. Burd *sum* was in Arkhangai *aimag*, and now is in Övörkhongai. So, in 1938, I became the Party cell leader in Burd *sum* in Övörkhongai, Ondor Ulaan in Arkhangai, and in my own birthplace, Mörön. Then after the 1945 war, I was called by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to work officially in foreign espionage since I had participated in the emancipation of Inner Mongolia from Japan after the war. I was in that Ministry for eleven years. After 1955, I was called to manage the Party *negdel* movement in the countryside with the aim of winning people over. 130 people were selected, and I was a *negdel* leader for twenty-one years.

At the end of the seventies, the *negdels* were placed under “The Federal *Negdel* High Counsel,” whose leader was G. Lodoikhuu from the Gov-Altai *aimag*. I thought he was a good leader, and he was highly praised. For seven years, we advised this Council and the *negdels* themselves on national measures, as well as answering their questions. In addition, we helped manage the economy that dealt with pigs, chickens, and hares. To that end, after six years of work, I had organized the “Tungalag Tamir” (“Bright Strength”) co-operative. So this is how I have worked in my country for over sixty years.

IL: Were there all sorts of border incidents when you did your military service in Bayantumen?

RM: The military knew of border incidents which I don’t actually know since I didn’t serve on the frontier.

IL: Arkhangai *aimag* certainly has a different environment from Bayantumen. How does the herding life differ from the life of a soldier on the frontier?

RM: Herding is the same everywhere with only a few differences from locality to locality. In the desert, one follows the herds on a horse. On the steppe, there is freedom to pasture the herds at far distances, and there is not a lot of attention paid to the *khashaa* for the livestock who generally spend their nights in the pastures, and now and again go to the wells for water. In the desert, the herds can be tethered with a faded-looking line. In the *khangai*,

children leave their *gers* and follow the animals on foot through the valleys. In the desert, this does not happen. The desert herds do not usually flock together, though they may in the *khangai*. The herders and their families follow the Kerülen River basin, though there are not many families in the area. In Bayantumen there were both the infantry and the cavalry, and we crossed the border with our herds into Inner Mongolia. Everyone crossed the border into Inner Mongolia—that was how the poor made a living. But this was a problem for the border patrol but did not concern me because I served as an internal soldier.

2.3. My Family

YK: When were you married?

RM: I was a leader in 1938 and became a Party cell leader in Burd *sum* where I met a woman.

YK: How did you get to know your wife?

RM: Something happened during this rough period. Everyone who worked in this big outfit learned to write. And those adults who did not know how, maybe 20 or 30 people, met in the *sum* center where they had to study so it could be certified that they could write. The group was called “The Adult Class,” and I got to know a girl in this group. I did not teach her, but I talked with her about the Motherland, the Party, the government, and private property. We did not talk about the *negdels*. She came from a well-off family, and she seemed suitable for me to marry although, at the time, her older brother was not keen on this. Who knows why a local person does not like a so-called orphan or wanderer. Her parents said: “Child, you are taking up with the Party cell leader, R. Minjuur, and there is talk that you are going to marry him!” Then they went on to say that I had work to do, so could not marry her.

The leader of our Party cell was a man called N. Chikhaajav, and he was also leader of the co-operative. He helped us by speaking to the girl’s mother and father about our marriage, and he knew how to persuade them. So we got married in 1941, and we soon had a child. At the time, I did not have my own home, but lived in the large *ger* belonging to the *sum* administration. In the morning, I would get up, wash my face and hands, and go off to work. There was an old stoker who was paid by the *sum* administration, and he slept in our not very nice *ger* with a cupboard, one table, and one chair. The table and chair were used extensively for our tea, and we sat on the chair for work. It was in this *ger* that my wife and I lived. We kept a horse outside for trips to the districts.

At the time, I was in touch with my Uncle Renchin, and he had prepared a small *ger* and urged me to take it. So, I went on the relay and returned with

his *ger*. In addition, my uncle had loaded three ox carts to go to this side of White Lake and Mörön *sum* to the *aimag* center. So, in due course, I moved. People met at the craft co-operative in the Burd *aimag* center with twenty ox carts, and three were for our *ger*. We reached Burd in the morning, and so I had my first 4-all sectioned small *ger* where my wife and I lived. In that year she gave birth to a son, so there was a child in our family. After this older brother, mother, and father approved of our marriage, and one day came by with two chests of clothes. So that was my family.

YK: Had you prepared a wedding?

RM: I did have a wedding. Since my uncle was not there, I alone begged and prayed and prepared for the marriage. There was, however, no wedding feast since her family did not approve of our marriage. In our *sum*, a man named O. Galsantseren was in charge of raw materials, and my future wife and I often visited him. [Editor: we assume that Mr. Galantseren supported their marriage] That is how I got married. After three years, there were more children, and I was the Party cell leader in Ondor-Ulaan *sum* in Arkhangai. At the time, the Party cell leaders worked for a year, and then they were changed, but I worked for three years in one *sum*. In those three years as Party cell leader, I began to buy yak and goat wool, and the “wool is gold” movement developed. The manes and tails of horses could also be sold. It was hard work trying to sell this hair and wool as people were not familiar with such practices, and they protested. The only way we could collect this wool or hair was to get it when the herds miscarried, became emaciated, or died. Besides all of this, a rumor went around that the clerical and secular feudal folk were good -for -nothings. Then the government drew up a contract with Russia for wool and hair, but the herders had none. In addition, we found it especially hard to comb the wool of the yaks and the goats. The price of such wool was very low, and few people valued it. The wealthy people in the countryside ignored using the co-operatives to sell their cashmere wool because the State paid them so little—no *tugriks*, only 50, 60 or 70 *mung*,²²⁾ which people were not keen on. So this “wool is gold” movement was a lot of work. But I went with the Party members off to comb the goats and shear the herds; in those days, the Party members worked hard. Members of the Party League brigades were sent off to fight the rich over their herds, and that is how the cashmere plan was fulfilled.

In 1942, I worked in Ondor-Ulaan *sum* in the Third State Building and was awarded the “Labor Medal of Honor,” which made people call me “Star Minjuur” since people with star medals were very rare.

YK: Did you, as Party cell leader, work with the cashmere wool?

RM: Yes, I led the Party cell members in shearing the animals and thanks to

me the plan was fulfilled, and we were awarded the first prize. Thus, I wear my medal—many medals.

YK: Are there many star medal winners in your area?

RM: No—few.

IL: In the 1940s, the first conference of the good herders was held. Were you part of it?

RM: I must have participated.

2.4. Ulaan Baatar in the 1940s

YK: What happened to the “One Thousand Herder Movement?”

RM: That occurred after the democratic period, and the Minister of Finance, P. Tsagaan, took the initiative. In my day, one could be given the title of “Great National Herder,” and the number of animals was irrelevant. In feudal times, the best herder was encouraged and rewarded with the title of “Iron Hearth.” Our family believed the award of an iron brazier or hearth for looking after the herds made one servile. A rich man could take that prize. After 1945, the Ministry of the Interior stopped such awards.

At the time the Ministry of the Interior played a very important role in Mongolia, and most of its work was secret. That Ministry had good people, and I was awarded a star for my work with some other good people. At the time our family moved to Ulaan Baatar with three children, the city was considered a tough town. There were few buildings with flats, and there were almost no cars and buses, so one went all over on foot. There was no construction, and our *ger* compound was near what is now the hospital for infectious diseases. We did not have our own *ger*, so the Ministry of the Interior gave us a five walled *ger*. At the time, my wife worked on a sewing machine making uniforms for the military arms industry, and our life was very difficult.

During the war, life in Mongolia was very hard. Prices sky rocketed: one kilogram of meat cost seventy *tugriks*, and bran was used to make coarse flour that had to be strained through cheesecloth before being used for food. People ate meat from skinny, emaciated horses, and beef was very expensive. I had the title of Lieutenant. What difficult times those were, and the Mongolian people were exhausted. Horses had to be prepared for the front. People stocked up on money, fur *deels*, clothes, and all sorts of things to prepare the herders for the front. We saved our salaries and were very much afraid in those hard times. Nevertheless, people were brave, loyal, and honest in loving and protecting the Motherland. It was damaging for those who did not follow this path. Some people became counter-revolutionaries, and some didn't. The yellow and black feudal people and the lamas tried, as did some others, to put

down the government. At that time, many people were wrongly arrested or accused and are now considered victims. Such a person could have been a counter-revolutionary, so such differences had to be sorted out. Must a counter-revolutionary be destroyed? I really cannot tell the difference—I don't know. The People's Government squashed the uprisings of the lamas and the feudal people.

In 1932 the lamas in the area of the Tariat lamasery rose up, and the local people came together and the rebellion was put down. At that time, the People's Government was very active, and our Party members and teachers worked as propagandists of the Revolution. Counter-revolutionaries were killed, and many people were ruined. The co-operative shop of the *sum* administration was burned and destroyed. At the same time, heaps of Russian goods like flour, tea, and tobacco were burned, and there was propaganda against using Russian stuffs. I wrote about all of this in my book. I was seventeen or eighteen when the counter-revolutionaries were put down. I had known them well as they had paid attention to us youngsters, and I knew they had suffered a great deal.

In the thirties, the Mongols co-operated in various enterprises and built communes. I did not understand that in 1932, the counter-revolutionaries were being hunted. At the same time, the State owned a good deal of property and organized monetary unions and collective farms or communes. The labor force, however, was not well developed. The State and the Party allocated funds for food, drink, merry-making, and play to try and “stop deviation.” Mr. N. Jagvaral's own personal work was writing a one thousand year history in which he criticized private property and individualism, while supporting co-operative ventures with the workers living close together. These ideas carried over into conversations about the communes. Perhaps this collectivization, bunching together of workers and organizing the *negdels*, or co-operatives, might encourage people to turn away from non-cooperative living. Some communes, however, had little money or what they did have was wasted. We believed in the co-operatives but were afraid they might fail, so we thought that lightening the work load or introducing more scientific approaches might make them more successful.

2.5. Building the *Negdel* Movement

The *negdels* began in 1954 and were set up all over. If someone wished to start a *negdel*, the Ministry and Party said: “Yes, of course.” One person became the leader for four or five families. One *negdel* was built near a ravine, and soon there were seven hundred and thirty *negdels*. I came from the Ministry of Interior to work in the countryside. I wondered why there were

so many *negdels*. Did they just sort of happen? The State, the *sum* administration, and the Party organized the *negdels* in the two hundred and fifty-five *sums*, and these *negdels* grew larger and expanded.

In 1955, we were summoned to go and work in the countryside. A new Party leader was appointed to organize and strengthen the *negdels*. I was an early leader in this organization process, but the government and the Party had to select the *negdel* leaders. In 1955, some Party leaders were called upon to be *negdel* leaders, but there were many conditions that had to be satisfied before being appointed to such a position.

In the countryside, the *gers* were set up in family groups and did not stand alone. Horses had to be equipped with saddles and bridles. Nine people left the Ministry of the Interior, and each of us was given a *ger* and a saddle and a bridle. We were given three months' wages. Those of us appointed to the *negdel* rode there by car, and we took a one year course at the Party school. We were taught in Kazakhstan for seven or eight months and had two months of practice with the Buryats.²³⁾ The State gave us a 1000 *tugrik* salary in the first year, but the *negdel* did not compensate us. The second year the salary was 800 *tugriks*, and the third year it was 600 *tugriks*. For the first three years, the State paid our salaries, which diminished over time. After the *negdel* became more self sufficient, it could pay our salaries. One had to distinguish oneself to be assured payment from the *negdel*, so the leaders began to compete for the Party's attention. Some people were rewarded for good work, and I was the only person awarded the "Red Flag Medal for Meritorious Work." So in that way I began to distinguish myself. I also began to think about returning to Mörön *sum* in Arkhangai.

That was my dream. At this time the rich were still rich, and the poor were still poor. I had thought about making the "wealthy people join the *negdel* and herd the animals for the *negdel*." When I was small, I herded for the wealthy, so that is what made me think this way.

"Go back to the country! Won't the rich be rich and the poor be poor?" That was the Party's thinking. The rich can be oppressive, so the *negdel* had to introduce herding in such a way that the poor could have a good influence, and life could be more comfortable and better for them.

I had this thought too. When my mother died, we had received neither help nor medicine from the wealthy, and when I joined the military no one wished me well or gave me assistance. Generally, rich people have little compassion. Now in Mongolia there are several rich people, so we need to think twice about this.

2.6. Leader of the Mörön *Negdel*

I went to my old locale and made 100% of the people join the *negdel*. *Negdel* members in the *khangai*, following the regulations, could keep fifty head of animals. This number later increased to seventy-five head. Those were the herds on the *negdel*. By 1969, I had built up within ten years a very successful *negdel* movement and was called a “Labor Hero.” I was made the leader of the Mörön *negdel* for four years. Then the *negdels* grew larger and joined together. Mörön *sum* was small and united with Ikh Tamir, Taikhar, and Bugat into one *sum* and one *negdel*, of which I was the leader.

IL: Speak about how 100% of the people joined the *negdel* in Mörön *sum*. Was it decided that each member should collectivize his herds?

RM: The *negdel* herder was generally introduced to collectivization officially. The “Model Regulations for the People’s Production on the *Negdels*” was drawn up to settle issues arising from the collectivization of the herds. Did the *negdel* members have to follow the regulations regarding the number of herds they kept for themselves? One had to take the initiative to settle these issues the *negdel* introduced. There were two difficult questions to consider. Does one enter the *negdel* on one’s own initiative, and how does collective labor make people’s lives better? If you demonstrate that collective life is better, people will join the *negdel* of their own accord or so the Party thought.

We planted crops, including potatoes, that supplied food for the herds. The *negdel* had a car that transported the *negdel* children and firewood to its dormitory school that was free. The *negdel* mothers took their children to the crèche and the kindergarten, which provided food and drink and where they could rest nearby. There was no disagreement about school for all of the *negdel* children, so all of them went to school. The herders on our *negdel* received a regular salary each month. Pensions as well as protective clothing were also given. Thus rich people were drawn to the *negdels* where they paid no taxes, though there were heavy taxes in the private economy in meat, wool, and milk. This could be considered additional oppression.

The State had to take measures to collectivize work that led to certain adjustments for the herds, but all this had to be done equally. Some good and bad things were done to different degrees. Some people took advantage to hide their animals or to suppress their numbers, so people had to expose them. The *negdels* held meetings to discuss these matters. A family was considered poor if its herds were less than fifty animals, and so the *negdel* gave them some of its animals. Many of the poor joined the collectives because they were given herds, and there were a lot of people to look after the animals:

“The *negdel* is giving you 250 sheep. Look after them well! Five of these sheep are yours to breed and to create many herds! A riding horse was also

given for herding in country areas. You need to build a *khashaa*, drill a well, and see that there is food for the animals.”

Food had to be prepared for the herds, and a *khashaa* had to be built from the basic materials available. The herds that the *negdel* members owned together as well as each family’s personal animals were put together collectively in the eaved *khashaa* for feeding, so that each herder did not have to cover all these costs. In this way, the poor people could have better lives.

IL: When the herds were collectivized, could those people with few herds live in the countryside or did they have to join the more settled populations in the towns?

RM: There were a lot of people like that, and quite a few settled in the towns. When the herds were collectivized, those families that did not herd on the *negdels* had to move to the towns. They went to the *aimag* centers and the *sum* centers or to Ulaan Baatar, Darkhan, or Erdenet. They worked in the huge industries in Darkhan and Erdenet and were dependent on their relatives or children.

IL: The *negdel* members kept an eye on the collectivized herds, but were they well looked after? Were they diminished?

RM: The *negdel* was the first to do something about the loss of livestock during collectivization when animals had to be sold in the market so people could eat. With greater demand for these animals the *negdel* lost even more animals.

IL: Can you tell us about your experience on the “Gerelt Zam” *negdel* in “Ikh Tamir” *sum*, and how you got that *negdel* on its feet economically?

RM: The *negdel* was essential to production in the herding economy, so attention had to be directed toward feeding and watering the herds, sheltering them in the *khashaa*, and paying the herders’ salaries. The *negdel* herds produced the milk for the dairy products that led to an income. Market regulations controlled the profit from these and other products that led to a strengthening of trade for the *negdel*. For example, our local laws and the forestry laws were very crude at the time, if they existed at all. Our *negdel* had a lot of trees, and there was a demand for wooden planks and poles as well as for *khujir*, or salt marsh and salt which were sold in Bayankhongor and Gov-Altai [*aimags*].

The private herds of the *negdel* members increased and had to be separated and counted. One family with two or three branches had the possibility of owning one hundred and fifty head of cattle dispersed throughout the family. Many disparaged the *negdel* herds or paid them scant attention. However, the large private herds, even though they were well fed, diminished for no apparent reason probably because as they grew bigger they had to be

collectivized in accordance with the regulations. Finally, in the *khangai*, fifty more animals were added to the overall count making seventy five head, which in the end turned out to be one hundred head as more were collectivized. All the members of the *Khural*²⁴⁾ endorsed such regulations. Therefore, “Ikh Tamir” *sum*, “Gerelt Zam” *negdel* was collectivized, and I played a role in this collectivization. In the end, the “Ikh Tamir” *negdel* members organized these matters and made the arrangements.

2.7. The Worker in the Ministry of the Interior

Marshal Choibalsan summoned me to Ikh Tenger Valley for a job providing food for honored guests when they came from abroad or visited from home. The government set up a bureau with a laboratory to do research on food products in the economy. I ran the farm, located in Bogd uul in the Ikh Tenger Valley, which produced meat, wool, milk, and dairy products. The farm is still there.

There were no buildings around where school # 1 is today, only private *gers*, and ours was behind where the school is now. I did not go to Sükhbaatar Square in those days because it did not exist. Sükhbaatar Square²⁵⁾ was a swamp and was just being built, so the area was covered in dirt. There was no place to go in the evenings. The government palace near the theater, the Foreign Ministry, and the building for the Ulaan Baatar city administration were built in 1945 after the war. At that time, there were many Japanese soldiers who had been captured. Japan was responsible for many things and had offered to pay a war debt. Thanks to this compensation, there was money for the materials for the new construction. I was in the city at that particular time, and there were work groups set up to protect these captured soldiers. I had a horse and with many branches of the military protected these soldiers. I was responsible for their well-being although they had their own hospital and supervisor outside their compound. Terrible things had happened to these captured soldiers, and many had become sick. At the time, there was one market for food and other goods in the area of the present day station. No flats had been built and later the railroad grew up there.

IL: Where did you go to buy what you needed to eat and drink?

RM: At the time, we went to the “Ondor Khoshoo” (The Tall Co-operative) which is now the Fine Arts Museum. That was our largest store, and there were also a lot of Chinese stores. There was a Chinese store on Ninth Street near the Lenin Museum in the Chinese neighborhood. There was also a large food store there. There was also the Chinese movie club “Shianz” and a number of adobe or plaster houses. There were many Chinese people in Mongolia. At that time, the Mongols did not plant crops or greens, so the

Chinese grew their own greens and sold or traded them.

All the offices had their own herds, and the private herds gave meat but no dairy products. In 1955, I went back to the countryside. The railroad now reached the area, and many Russian enterprises had been built. Recently, they have constructed many buildings. The Chinese build rather well and built a huge store with houses nearby. However, there were quarrels with the Chinese, and they were chased away amidst much suffering. However, things went well with the Russians who did a lot for us. But when democracy arose, they too were chased away. The worst thing I wish to comment on was the great amount of wealth and wasted money. When the Chinese and the Russians left, many things were destroyed. Now the whole world pays attention to Mongolia, and we have received a great deal of help. Buildings have been built as they were in the past, and Japan has helped us in many ways.

During the war of liberation, my wife and I abandoned Arkhangai, and I went on to Höhhot with my detachment which was very large and was called Sulenker. We assembled in Ulaantsav and Shilin Gol where there were only Japanese soldiers. Then the Russian and the Mongolian military came together to chase them from the area and free Inner Mongolia which united with China for the larger war. At that time things were very difficult for the Inner Mongolians because they had been oppressed by a foreign country and had been ravaged. The Manchus had dominated Inner Mongolia and then, in our time, the Japanese conquered the country. It had no power of its own—everything was Japanese. The situation for the herders was similar to ours, with each family owning about the same number of animals as we did. It was desirable to capture the country because of its great amount of meat. But the Japanese were cowardly, and the people were afraid. The Chinese were suspicious because of the Japanese spies. You could even be regarded as a Japanese spy from the Mongolian side. Because of this, the Japanese destroyed those spies found on the Russian side. There were many horrible things at that time, and people suffered greatly. Many disappeared, were caught, or were ruined. It was, however, easy to communicate, and the older people spoke up easily though it was different for the young.

Höhhot was poor, and the old Ulaan Baatar at the Bogd lamasery was strewn with trash. There were no buildings surrounding the capital at the time while in Inner Mongolia there were many lamas and many lamaseries, which the Chinese severely oppressed. In reality, the Chinese were very bad to the Buddhists, and today little has changed. I don't believe in Buddhism. It is false and fraudulent and not good.

3. The Rural Negdel Economy

3.1. The Collectivization of the Herds

IL: The people collectivized the *negdel* herds, and the *negdel* members became responsible for them. Could you elaborate on this collectivization in greater detail?

RM: In Mongolia private property had once predominated. Then co-operative production became strong, and the Mongolian government was eager for the herds to be more productive. But the State had to finance and develop schools, medical services, trade, and consumer goods that would increase the yield from the herds and in turn would provide the resources for this expansion, as well as promoting a scientific approach to animal husbandry and medical services for the herds themselves. There was also a demand to develop the new branch of the agricultural economy that dealt with plants and crops. Mongolians, however, did not generally plant crops and considered it very hard work. Though one or two may have undertaken a bit of planting, it was not in the interest of most people to do so. Planting relied on co-operative labor, but in a private economy people generally did not get together to raise crops. All Mongolians had to be involved in this sort of agriculture, and all Mongolians had to become literate. The ills from feudal society had to be erased. Young women had to bear children who could grow up healthy. How was all of this to be accomplished? Through government supported co-operative labor. This had to be a requirement of the Mongolian State.

There were many herds in the private economy, and so there were many hides and skins to sell. Butter was made from the milk which was also sold. Now there is no co-operative labor and there are very small yields from each family's 20, 10 or 5 liters of milk, which is not enough to take to the factory for butter. When there was the co-operative economy, one farm with 150 cows employed not less than 10 milkmen. And the milk from the cows went to the factory. The *sum* had over 1000 milking families, 150 livestock herds, and 10 milking farms. So, it was asked, what was the best way to make all this butter? Taking everything into consideration, collectivization or *negdelization* was imperative to stimulate Mongolia.

Mongolia should be among the great States of the world, so our Party organized the co-operatives and was very clear that collectivization was inevitable. Many people lived isolated lives which led to unhappiness because, for example, during the *zud* a family's herds could be lost. Thus people began to realize that it was best to live collectively and work together in the butter factory making butter, collecting wool, or trading co-operatively in cashmere. In addition, on a co-operative, the doctor for the herds could be consulted about impregnation and other biologically advanced methods of raising the

young animals which would lead to increased production of wool, cashmere, and meat.

In the private economy, 100 sheep bore 50 to 60 young. Working co-operatively, 90 lambs could be produced, and even 100 lambs from the best herders. The *negdel* members worked together feeding the herds and providing a *khashaa* with an eaved roof. Isn't the question tending 100 sheep with 40 to 50 young, or tending 200 sheep with 100 young? The *negdel* relies on building a co-operative economy in which chronic infections disappear and the herds can grow, increase, and produce. Chronic infectious diseases also needed to be wiped out among our people. All children attended school. Some finished in the eighth class and went on to the technicum (TMS) while others went and completed the tenth class, and then they would go on to university. People were starting to understand that the *negdels* were doing the right things, and there was much interest in this.

60 to 70 per cent of all citizens were poor even if they owned some property, while 30 per cent lived above that level. There were a few people who led wealthy lives but they could not fulfill the country's needs. The poor, who made up 70 per cent of the labor force, considered the herds their capital and carried out the policies of the country. For that reason people built the *negdels* and joined them, although about 5 to 10 per cent did not like them. About 60 to 70 per cent of the population liked the *negdels*, and people even won over the support of a few wealthy people. So the *negdels* prevailed, members joined, and regulations were drawn up.

3.2. Regulations on Joining the *Negdel*

One had to write a letter to the *negdel* announcing the wish to join and then one had to pay 25 *tugriks*. I wrote about my interest in voluntarily joining the *negdel* and about my life, my family, and my herds. When the leader of the *negdel* administration received my letter, he spoke up at the meeting attended by ten people on the *negdel* council who were already members of the *negdel*.

"So this guy is joining the *negdel*! He has 100 head of cattle, and there are 6 people in his family—mother, father, wife, and children. Why is he joining the *negdel*?" The leader of the *negdel*, which I would ultimately direct, introduced the *negdel* regulations: "You can keep 50 head of cattle, and 100 goes to the *negdel*. You must pay 25 *tugriks* voluntarily from your herding. You must give to the *negdel* not less than 10 of your milk cows, sheep, and goats and 20 of your horses and stallions. The *negdel* will provide you with a daily wage for your labors in herding. In addition, for each day of work, you will receive several grams of meat and milk as you become familiar

with the operations of the *negdel*.” All the people present agreed.

At that time the *negdel* was called the “People’s Production *Negdel*,” and people were paid by the day in produce. The leader met with those joining the *negdel* and said that although one may have only a few animals, a record of their color and sex should be established that would cost 25 *tugriks*. Then a vote was taken, and the leaders made decisions about herding and enrolling members. Many people asked questions all at once, and those who came to the meeting had to be checked by name. Minutes were taken, and a resolution was passed and scrupulously recorded and stamped, which can now be seen in the archives. The voluntary application for joining the *negdel* is there as well, and it is often read. It states: “I voluntarily wish to join the People’s Production ‘Victory’ *Negdel*.”

3.3. *Negdel* Administration

At that time the *negdel* establishment consisted of an accountant, a leader, and a treasurer. Like today, there was neither a veterinarian nor an animal technician. Such professionals were rare in Mongolia. There was not even a Party representative, especially on the agricultural *negdels*. Education was not promoted. I, myself, did not finish school but went into the military for three years where I learned how to write as well as the four mathematical approaches up to one thousand. I was educated in the military before demobilization. One had to be literate and have a mastery of numbers and the Chinese abacus to be the accountant or the treasurer. The stoker and the cleaner were the two other official employees.

The *negdel* administration did its office work in a *ger*. There were no warehouses, and we, ourselves, did little things which did not mean we did nothing. Many on the *negdel* loved herding, and the poor people did most of it. But there were quarrels about herding. For example, once ten people enrolled in the *negdel* with 400 sheep and goats. A dispute broke out over who would do the herding, so they chased after their own animals and divided them up depending on their situation in life. The collectivized *negdel* herds were branded, and our brand was a crescent moon. Each *negdel* had its own brand. The sheep and goats were branded on the far side of their left ears with what was called a “medical notch.” The cows were branded above the hoof, and the horses above the left hip. This brand was a sign to others of the division of the herds. The *negdel* leader was a man of reputation and people reported “he gave us 15 goats and 40 sheep that we hope will grow well and produce good wool!”

The *negdel* leader showed the good herders around the area. At that time the Party and the government promoted the local *negdels* and said the good

herders could live there and would be granted good areas. They were told that they could spend the winter and the spring there. When the organization began it was said that “You, Dorj, Bold, and Ochir are three families in one camp (or primary production unit) and Dorj is the boss.” The camp boss had the very important job of dealing with the renovation of the winter and spring quarters, as well as handling the problems of both the young and the old and supervising all construction. One camp or primary production unit included three families with wives and children and about ten other family members with 500 sheep and six stallions. They were told where to build a *khashaa*. Ox carts would be used to help carry the wooden poles. At the time people cut down the trees on their own initiative since we had plenty of wood for building the *khashaa*. In addition, there were no problems digging a well. The ten family members watched the herds, and seven or eight of them built the *khashaa*, mowed the grass, and gathered the wool from the herds.

An abundance of milk was collected when the sheep and goats were milked. Gradually the *negdel* administration acquired what it needed. First it got a 40 liter capacity milk can for large orders, and one ox cart could carry four of these cans. The accountant brought the milk from the production units by ox cart to the *sum* center’s 150 milk separating machines to be made into butter. There was a foreman at the factory, and the workers were honest. The butter was then sold to the State, and our *negdel* won a monetary prize for butter, wool, and cashmere. This is how we suddenly grew.

The private economy was becoming weak at the time, and the poor, who had the *negdel* support, did not like what the rich were doing. The wealthy then disliked what was going on and did not take their milk to the *negdel*, build their *khashaa*, or prepare food for the *negdel*. All of this led to the deterioration of the private economy on the *negdel*. In addition, the wealthy became arrogant and began to disparage the *negdel*, and there were rumors that they were trying to take the *negdel*’s land and water. As a result, people began to speak badly of the *negdel*, and things were not good. Thus, as of old, some of the Mongol people turned to drink, which happens even now. Drunken people leaned on each other and said: “It does not matter who is rich—Don’t you see how great our *negdel* is?”

The rich, like everyone else, had a tax officially added to their meat. Then the work in the milk factory became harder as more milk was produced. The production of meat also entailed a lot of work. Finally, the state tax was oppressive, as were the *negdel* regulations, so the rich had no way to manage and left the *negdel*. The *negdel* became more prominent in the area, and a school was established, which even the wealthy attended. Thus in spite of everything, the *negdel* flourished.

The *negdel* needed leaders for all these organizational tasks. However, some of the leaders drank spirits and wine and were not responsible for the work on the *negdel*. Each person was different. The herds would be neglected and reduced without honest labor, the quotas would not be met, and the milk factory would not function properly. Some leaders did not develop their *negdels* satisfactorily, while the poorer *negdels* were given state subsidies or loans that put them in debt. In some such cases the herds did not increase but were hidden, traded, or sold. The daily *negdel* wages were fixed, and members were paid from the *negdel's* income. Thus the *negdels* had to be good in every way.

3.4. Regulations Concerning the Appointment of the *Negdel* Leaders

When I served as a *negdel* leader in 1955, we received many awards and took no subsidies or loans from the state. At first, ten percent of Mörön *sum* consisted of *negdel* members. Even without a leader and few herds and little property, the *negdel* found ways to develop. Someone from the Party²⁶⁾ administration came with me to the *negdel*, and I went to the *sum*. A Party member came along with us to the *aimag*.

There were about 130 people, and 14 went on to Arkhangai where there were more than twenty *negdels*. We were received by the Party committee, and the *aimag* leader was D. Adya, and the *aimag* Party leader was S. Dashdendev. This was the *aimag* committee bureau and included many people. We talked to each other at the meeting: “Which *negdel* does this man come from?” “This man Minjuur comes from ‘Victory’ *negdel* in Mörön *sum*!” was emphatically stated. “So he should be appointed the *negdel* leader of ‘Victory’ *negdel* in Mörön *sum*.” So the *aimag* Party committee bureau passed a resolution, and a representative from the Party Committee followed me to my *negdel* in Mörön *sum*. We visited pitifully poor families who had become *negdel* members, but there was not one shabby *ger* with broken chattels, though we did see several mangy goats. The worst herds were, at this time, given to the *negdel*, and generally those on the *negdel* were given bad animals. There was also work in the *sum* administration outside the *negdel*. The leaders of the *sum* administration and the *sum* Party cell did their own work. They directed another private economy and looked at the long range development not connected to this one *negdel*. The *negdel*, on the other hand, paid little attention to these leaders. It was hard to be a *sum* leader because the Party cell leaders in the *sums* did official work and were affected by the private economy. Occasionally, on the *negdel*, the Party leader and the *sum* leader did not get along well. In such times, a meeting would be called. Once I attended a meeting because several local people were not happy. In fact,

there were many poor members of the *negdel* who intended to meet with the leader. The poor people who had improved their lot, however, were happy. The wealthy did not respect or support any of the leaders. Sometimes the leaders even spoke up for the wealthy. The meeting took place, and the representatives of the *aimag* Party committee spoke and asked questions:

“So this person Minjuur has the assignment. He has completed the Party School. He has gone to Buryat Russia where he did the practical work of studying their collectivization. Minjuur was not paid by the *negdel* but by the State, which gave him 1000 *tugriks* in the first year. It was thought that Minjuur improved your *negdel*, so you can elect him your *negdel* leader after everyone has spoken. How were new *negdel* members enrolled? How many people are you planning to enroll, and what does the *negdel* do about this? How do *negdel* members create an affluent life? Are they given herds? Are you serious about all of this? At the ‘Victory’ *negdel* there were ten poor people, and their ten odd camels were pretty mangy. There were more than 200 goats but no cows. There was, however, no land for those herds because all of those *negdel* members settled in one place before the rich chased them away. And the goats were chased too. So here are some examples regarding the questions.”

3.5. The *Negdel* Leader

“*Negdel* Regulations” are the topic. There was a meeting to discuss all of this and to approve the regulations that were worked out in a well-balanced fashion. The *negdel* leader and the accountant attended the meeting where there was a lot of talk about the situation at the “Victory” *negdel*, and the accountant talked about confirming 7, 8, or 10 members. The regulations that included each person having 50 head of cattle were approved. There was discussion about whether there should be more cattle. The question arose about where the members should live. For example, there was a homeless woman named Jigjid at the Chogchin winter quarters and what should be done about her food and a *khashaa* for her 20 goats? Will money come from the state? We talked about developing the *negdel* for itself. The State did not give us a loan or subsidy but it gave the *negdel* leader a salary. Now I had my own *ger* and horse with a saddle and a salary from the State. I was a big man, and my nickname was “1000 man.” Yu. Tsendenbal²⁷) was the leader of the State Commission when the *negdel* rules were finalized.

Many people had worked with the government bureau on these regulations which were modeled after those in the Arkhangai *aimag*, and our “Victory” *negdel* adjusted and changed some of the words. Thus the title was “Arkhangai *Aimag* Mörön *Sum* People’s Production ‘Victory *Negdel* Regulations.’” It was

said intentionally and with conviction that the People's Production *Negdel* was superior in its development than the private economy. The collective people's economy was generally regarded as superior. This would be more convincing if the rich in the private economy of the *negdel* did more work. The *nedgel* members should work harder than the rich people in the private economy. The wealthy knew that they should join a *negdel* but still said: "Oh, the collective economy is useless for us!" But most people considered joining the *negdel*, and requests were received continually. The leaders held several meetings to discuss these petitions and stressed that people had to join the *nedgel* voluntarily. In applying, the age and sex of the animals had to be stated. If a person wrote down five cows, he had to make clear how many were yellow, how many were calves in the second year, and how many were calves in the first year. In addition, the number of first and second year calves had to be specified. Although the regulations stated that everyone should be able to write, if there were people with little schooling, the primary school teachers could help with completing the written forms. Thus, if the *negdel* continued to work hard, its herds would grow. The State, therefore, had to be vigilant as it was eager for the *negdels* to increase. So I was watched from the top and, with a salary of 1000 *tugriks* a month, people were anxious to see what he would do with the "Victory" *negdel*. Such were the peculiarities in those days.

An example must be made of the superiority of the *negdel* over the private economy based on the constant increase of the herds, and the good herders need to look after the *negdel* flocks. The good herder had to be able to adjust to whatever happened, carefully construct the *khashaa*, and exploit what was needed in a specific area. Great attention was paid to breeding, especially to that of the male animals. In the past, the breeding process was disorganized, and there was a problem of how the *negdel* sheep would be impregnated by the ram. Other questions included how long could a horse and an ambler stallion be left without castration, which bull should be mated with which cow to produce the best young, which goat and billy goat should be mated and finally, how were the offspring faring after a year. Planning was necessary to address all these issues.

At the time there was no animal technician or veterinarian, and the *negdel* leader was the head of everything. He, himself, performed the duties of the technician, the veterinarian, and the agronomist. Since many Party members joined the *negdel*, a Party cell was organized with a Party cell leader who was very serious. We worked together, but the *sum* Party cell was separate.

3.6. The School Dormitory

I became famous for several reasons in only four or five years. We built a school dormitory in the *sum* where there were two hundred children in the primary school and most were poor. It was hard for these children to get to school since their families were so spread out. They would come by horse to school one day and return home in the evening. The next day, however, they would not come and so would skip the lesson, which made them unhappy. Thus our *negdel* wished to construct a dormitory building. At first, several *gers* served as the dormitory for the children, with rooms set up on wooden tent frames. The State gave us money for the children's food. There is a saying "live in a fool's paradise" meaning fools adjust! I knew that people had to be provided with food and drink, clothes, and shelter. Our young people were satisfied in doing good work and having enough to eat. But they also liked their light musical melodies and going to the dance hall, so they had to work. The school administrator pointed out that the children of 68 *negdel* members attended school and that I was responsible for their food, fuel, and fire as well as helping to look after their studies. So money had to be budgeted for the *negdel's* 68 children and the education department: "Minjuur, you are really doing what is right! You are setting up wooden beds in the tents and stoking the fires. You act as the caretaker, renovate the building, and open a canteen to feed 68 children with vegetables and potatoes." People, however, were not used to eating such things and thought of them as filthy. The children were given all sorts of things to eat including stomach and offal, potatoes, turnips, and carrots, which the cook also served the *negdel* members from the money given to the leader by the State. In all, the State gave 40,000 *tugriks*—30,000 for construction, with 10,000 left over. Such was this work and its accounts. One newspaper wrote that "Minjuur has fed and housed the children of the *negdel* members in the school dormitory, and the work has been aided by the State. I believe that this is the first time since the Council of Ministers passed the resolution that a dormitory school for children has been set up. You have taken the initiative for doing this, and now you are famous. The Council of Ministers has passed another resolution that all the *negdel* must have dormitory schools for the children where they can eat and drink without payment." But after some of the people got drunk they said in anger: "You did the wrong thing in building the dormitory and offering free food and drink to the children, and this could lead to your ruin! Poor green Minjuur—we will kill you!"

Strange. This life is very, very interesting. However, I was invited to a second meeting with the teachers, and I was greatly appreciated for my initiative and work. Many *negdel* leaders had good reputations, paid attention,

and worked hard to achieve good things for the country. Others focused on the distribution of money but did not keep it for themselves, as the wealthy do today. With money, one must do useful things for the country.

3.7. The *Negdel* Hotel

Secondly, a long time ago the representative of the *negdel aimag* Party committee came to stay with the Party cell leader, and the *aimag* leader came to stay with the *sum* leader while the Minister of Agriculture stayed in the *negdel* leader's *ger*. There was no hotel with a restaurant in the area. I received the *sum* representative and considered starting a hotel. In due course, if people had the money they could get a room and go to the restaurant. This hotel brought income to the *negdel* that lightened the burden on the State. There was money in the budget for both the hotel restaurant and the dormitory canteen. A guest who went to another hotel had to pay one *tugrik*, 50 *mung*, which was the market price at the time. For 5 nights, our price was 7 *tugriks*, 50 *mung*, with 3 meals a day. Thus, for forty or fifty *mung*, guests got a good meal and were pleased. It was hard to stay with a family, but at the hotel the food was prepared, and people went off to work comfortably. So the hotel was quite a sensation and the newspaper said that "People can go to Minjuur's *sum* hotel with a restaurant after work!"

3.8. The *Negdel* Gardens

I also decided to plant vegetables and began with potatoes that the State had introduced. Our area was high in the mountains, so things did not grow too well, but our Mörön *sum* center and a small valley were alongside the flowing Bayanjargalant River where I decided to grow these potatoes. Several bags of seeds were given to the *aimag* for the potatoes. Members found shovels, and there were little green areas to tread on and till. Members would call out: "Come here with that shovel! Plough this place and plant those potatoes!" The shovels were used for tilling and harrowing the land. The horse then made treads to finish preparing the field for planting. The area was almost a hectare. I had become somewhat of an agronomist and directed the planting myself. I carried a skirt or a spade full of potatoes and planted them one by one leaving, twenty centimeters of space between them. A water channel was dug for other green areas in the Jargalant valley. A small pool was also made from which pails of water were used to dampen the green area two or three times daily. At the time there was also a lot of rain so the weeds grew and spread and had to be pulled out. Our potatoes grew really well but they did not grow in Khangai or Tariat *sums*.

There was an all *aimag* Party meeting in the fall with much talk about

the *negdel's* potatoes. The leader of the Party Committee gave a report in which he mentioned that “Victory” *negdel* had gotten a high yield from its potatoes. The *negdel* members were allotted days to work in the fields, and their potatoes were given to the hotel guests and to the children in the school dormitories. At this meeting Dashdendev, the leader of the Khangai *negdel*, said that his potatoes were small while Minjuur’s were as big as a clenched fist! What a funny thing to say.

There was much talk about these potatoes at the meeting, and the newspaper covered it all. The potatoes were fed to the school children, and guests who visited were fed potatoes, but there were no potatoes in Arkhangai *aimag*. The newspaper joked that “Minjuur is a big potato.” In the fall the work days were allotted, and the potatoes were collected. At that time, at a big meeting the *negdel* evaluated work in “labor days” whereas now work is measured in money. One “labor day” provided 1.2 kilograms of meat, 2 kilograms of potatoes, and 4 kilograms, dairy, etc. People came to this big meeting by ox cart, so they could take their load of vegetables, potatoes, meat, and dairy products. Little money was used except at the co-operative where it was spent on flour, grain, and sugar. The *negdel* members were pleased with all of this, and the wealthy were deliberately given potatoes.

Our “Victory” *negdel* center was a place called “Ulaan Uzuur.” People came there on horses and loaded up their saddle bags with potatoes. Lkhamsüren was a rich man who had 100 cows—the most in Mörön *sum*. So I deliberately gave him potatoes and told him that they were very tasty, had lots of vitamins, and were good for the health. “Oh-this is from the leader of course! Thank you” was said about all those potatoes in my saddle bags. But he had already thrown away many, many potatoes and had had his fill of them. Someone said emphatically: “Mr. Lkhamsüren, you are throwing out those potatoes from Ulaan Uzuur.” I wrote down in my book that our potatoes were generally not eaten because people were suspicious and reported that they crackle with a bad taste or that they had no flavor. Even the cows did not eat them. I also spoke about the canteen in the children’s dormitory and how those who came from the city and country to the *aimag* were fed. Some people who came from the city to the *aimag* did not like potatoes, but the papers found all of this news about potatoes most interesting, and this brought us fame.

3.9. The *Negdel* Handicraft Industry

There was the issue of the so-called socialist labor brigade.

G. Mandakh, the railroad Hero of Labor, was the first to take the initiative and organized the Mörön brigade. There was a lot to do: we made mud from bricks using water and lime from limestone. I had met a man named Bariul

who had lived at the Gandan Monastery but had become secular and had returned home. There was a brick making industry in the town, and the clergy from the Gandan held a service there which was led by a man named Ulambarin Divaanamsal. The *negdels* made their own lime, but we needed to find some money. We were employed making the lime and the bricks near the *negdel*, but we received no subsidies in doing all of this.

Our carpenters and smiths were the most talented in the country and successfully made bowls, chests, tent frames, small chairs, and other things all for the *negdel* members. However, they were poor.

At the time, there was a plan for “cultural intervention” (i.e., attempts to civilize) that created a lot of work making chairs for families who had none, so when someone entered the *ger*, there was no place to sit. The *negdel* members, therefore, were employed making these chairs that they could also enjoy. This was interesting news, and the paper wrote: “Families have chairs!” and there was praise for becoming civilized.

Although craftsmen were needed, there was no metal for them to work with, so I went to Ulaan Baatar and found all sorts of metal rubbish that I brought back home. The craftsmen were very happy with this metal and made all sorts of things, including knives especially fashioned for eating. There were neither knives nor locks at that time and again, the newspaper wrote about us saying that “the ‘Victory’ *negdel* has become a store.” The craftsmen in our *negdel* gave each of us a knife, which made eating much easier. A purse with a lock was made for the *negdel* leader, which was very smart indeed! It was not at all crude and was embossed with an elegant silver pattern. These Mongolian craftsmen and smiths made fine things and worked with the local willow wood and brass that was used for keys. When the leader was given his purse, it was remarked that he could now lock his bag. Such a bag would have cost 30 to 40 *tugriks* at the store, but his cost only 20 to 30, which was still a lot of money since one sheep cost 20 to 30 *tugriks*. Amidst all this that was going on, the *negdel* herds were growing and producing a good yield.

Money was earned by people who made lime and bricks while the smiths and the carpenters made all sorts of things. With future technology, a car could even be made but for the present, there are only ox carts for work. The *negdels* had a rather original model cart that some people talk about. In socialist times, the wealthy on the *negdels* talked about becoming poor and were introduced to collective property by the People’s Party. The truth is that before 1990 everybody on the *negdel* carried a heavy burden of responsibility for the government and the development of the State. I shall now talk further about this. The co-operatives have been called a mistake and collectivization should be condemned. With all this talk about democracy, I sometimes shout

like that too and think that I have nothing to hide about what I did. I was a pioneer but if I suddenly died, no one would talk about all of this. I don't know. So be it.

3.10. "Ikh Tamir" *Sum* "Gerelt Zam" *Negdel*

By 1959, the *negdel* movement was successful and henceforth, though there were fewer *negdels*, those that existed were larger. In fact, there were several large *negdels* and in one former *sum* there were 2 or 3. All the *sums* were streamlining their *negdels* into one *negdel*, and so our "Victory" *negdel* joined up with the Tariat *negdel*. The "Gerelt Zam" *negdel* in the Ikh Tamir *sum* in Arkhangai *aimag* as well as the Bugati "Bayan Zam" *negdel* and the Khanuin Taukharin "Gerelt Zam" *negdel* were all united into one *negdel*. The Bugat *sum*, the Takhir *sum*, and the Ikh Tamir *sum* were united into one *sum*, and the three *negdels* were united into one *negdel*, which led to changes in the resulting *sum* and *negdel* as well as among the leaders. Our Mörön *sum* united with Tariat, and then the leader of the Ikh Tamir "Gerelt Zam" was made the leader. I ran this big *negdel* that had grown rich and enormous by 1961 and M. Dash, a learned scholar and writer from the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party Institute of History, was there.

There is a picture of "Gerelt Zam" done by the first *negdel* member, a man called Sanduijav. This man mowed the hay with a sickle very well and was considered an important man.

IL: The first school was set up in 1919 in what is now Khan-Ondor *bag*.²⁸⁾

RM: Yes, the primary school in Khan-Ondor *bag* was built in 1919.

IL: Does this picture look like "Gerelt Zam" when you worked there?

RM: Yes, it does.

IL: This then is your picture of the labor hero R.Minjuur.

RM: At the time, the picture was poor but at that time it was hard to print a picture on paper. This is not the case now.

IL: In 1970, a book came out. How did the State create a model for a large collective economy? Was there much talk about this? Look at the picture of Ikh Tamir *sum* center where the Tamir River flows alongside the Taikhar rocks.

RM: We went there before there was a smart and good man in charge of the *negdel*. The *negdel* had many herds that had grown well and fulfilled the State's plan, and attention had also been paid to the many poor people. The *sum* had had a school for ten years, and there was a polyclinic in the center. There was a State co-op, and several community organizations in this large *sum* and the *negdel* had a fair amount of industry that made it very different from the "Victory" *negdel*, so I had to think about an organizational method.

The Mörön “Victory” *negdel* had one primary school, and I budgeted money for the school children to eat in the *negdel* canteen. The Tamir *negdel*, on the other hand, had 1000 children in its 10 year school and was involved in what is called joint production.

YK: Was this the so-called *Negdel* Joint Production organization?

RM: The so-called NDU gave the *negdel* herding pens, helped with major construction projects, and the planting of crops. Compared with Mörön’s “Victory” *negdel*, there were many more intellectuals working here, including an animal specialist, an agronomist, and a veterinarian. What sort of responsibility would I have to assume? I had to make sure to fulfill the plan for the increase in the herds and introduce Minjuur’s potatoes, which I had taken such care to grow. In fact, these potatoes and other vegetables had to flourish along with the herds. In addition, an electric station and a diesel station were needed to produce light and with all these professionals and intellectuals we could effectively accomplish what was necessary. Many of these professional people were very busy and liked this work, and we applied their expertise and knowledge precisely. The best workers on the *negdel* presented solutions to our problems.

There was a plan to increase the herds that meant greater profit for us, and I worked to sell more animals. If a teacher, a worker, or an intellectual or professional so requested, they would be given the extra animals, five to ten sheep for example, at lower prices. Each family prepared its own sheep to eat, and it was said that “this leader is really stuffing us with food!” Thus I guess I got along with people. In the spring, there were a lot of potatoes and green vegetables planted. Each *negdel* was responsible for the school hospital and dormitory. There were six school dormitories where 700 children stayed and were fed. We had to give all these children vegetables, meat, and dairy products. We needed machines to help us grow these vegetables, so tractors and car drivers were put to work. There was also an independent garage for work on the cars.

Bugat “Bayan tal *negdel*” and Khan-Ondor and Ikh Tamir “Gerelt Zam” *negdel* joined into one *negdel* in the middle of Taikhar stone near the center of Taikhar. The two champion *nedgels* “Ikh Tamir” and “Gerelt Zam” had already united to form the Ikh Tamir “Gerelt Zam” *negdel*. At first, things did not go so well, and there was a lot of talk of “yours and mine.” After some argument, each side gave in a little bit, and they reconciled and set to work on building up the *negdel* brigade, the development of co-operative trade, the construction of the “Red Corner” (recreation room), and the development of art.

The brigade leader and the accounts clerk stayed in their office at night,

and a builder put big money down for a building. The Bugat “Bayan Tal” *negdel* stayed quite independent and went about increasing its herds. So I, an intelligent person, concentrated on the well being of everyone, which was good. Thus, having heard about the work, many teachers and professionals came to the *aimag* town while the school’s students worked raising vegetables. There was work in the hayfields, helping with the herds’ winter quarters, and preparing for the spring. The canteen at the dormitory school had good food for the children, and the herds produced a lot of milk for dairy products. The milk was transported in an overflowing cistern to the *sum* center. Families without milk were given milk, and families without food were given food. The dairy food was stored in a warehouse, so the children always had an adequate supply of cheese or boiled milk that was served in bowls.

The potatoes and vegetables were picked and given to the children, and the *negdel* leader saw that the potatoes were well prepared and that all the food had flavor. He also was concerned that the dormitory was warm, the bedclothes were clean, and the children were comfortable. All these problems concerned the *negdel* leader, and he had to take care of them himself. I had to find out what we were short of—for example, the head teacher did not have a table to put things on. One person who visited the school said: I have been to your school which has good food like your potatoes, but the turnips have no taste! I saw the dormitory beds, and the linen was dirty. People who work there think a lot about their money and when they will be paid. There must be food to eat everywhere and the leader must be aware of all of this.

What is each person responsible for? We had known, and so we sat down and talked about responsibilities, but empty talk was not useful, and if a leader scolded too much he got a bad name. At that time, both the *sum* leader and the *negdel* leader became quite powerful. The *negdel* and *sum* leaders used to talk to each other, but now the government and the leader converse. Such was my work situation.

3.11. The Quality of the Herds

A lot of work was done to improve the quality of the breed of the herds. Our *negdel* built up an economy based on fine sheep’s wool and wool from goats. With cross breeding, cows could produce five to ten liters of milk a day. 100 of our cows were cross bred to produce 1000 cows. There were 6000 people and 150,000 to 160,000 animals with about 10,000 in private hands. The learned people busily studied the joint committee’s scholarly research on improving the quality of the herds. People on the *negdel* improved the herds by separating some animals. One scholar divided his time among the two *negdels* and suggested separating a definite number of sheep and using the

rams with fine wool to impregnate them. The lambs produced in this way improved the herding industry and brought fame to “Ikh Tamir” *sum*. Another famous works project was providing shelters and food. In this way, if there was a major *zud* and conditions were arduous, there was enough food to feed the animals for five to ten days. Our animal *khashaa* at “Ikh Tamir” *sum* was seen as a national model and as the most important way of dealing with the herding economy.

YK: Did your *negdel* build such a *khashaa* for its animals? Did each family build its own *khashaa* for its herds?

RM: This work was done thanks to the *negdel* members. At the time, the *negdel* had a car and a tractor and some technology. Our task was to build a *khashaa* in the official place in the *negdel* center. Many *khashaas* were needed: three for the garage, two for the school, two for the clinic, and five for the *sum*. A *khashaa* was built in the official place that provided food and water and transportation for the *negdel*. The *negdel* brigades built the many good *khashaas* with the plentiful wood in our area.

IL: How was the place to build the *khashaa* chosen?

RM: The location was chosen after talking it over with the herdsmen in the herders’ brigade. There were such questions as shouldn’t the construction be where the herds are producing their young? Or where the hybridization farm was built? Or put them on the back slope or the ledge? After this exchange of opinions, the places were chosen and *khashaas* with eaves were built that were warm and comfortable. There were 5 brigades: the “Gerelt Zam” *negdel* and the “Golt” brigade, the “Bulag” brigade, the “Khan Ondor” brigade, the “Khokh Nur” brigade, and the “Olont” brigade. An electric power station united the five central brigades in to three. All the central brigades had electric stations and communication by wire, a recreation room, a warehouse, and a hotel, and people from the brigade worked in the office. In this way, each brigade created a nice little village, and demands could be communicated by wire. The central brigades also had a regular mail system, and the brigades received mail twice a day for seven days, and they received the newspapers. We also had tractors, cars, horses, and ox carts for the pastoral economy, and, without them, life would be difficult. Nevertheless, we made some mistakes.

3.12. The Health of the *Negdel* and the Issue of Medical Treatment

The doctor met with pregnant women once a week in the *sum* center. He kept a chart, and people were healthy. Many children were born, and a herder’s family had, altogether, as many as 16 children and as few as 3 or 4. One herder could have as many as 8 to 10 children. The women herders usually gave birth every other year, and the doctor always took the women to the *sum*

center 7 or 8 days before the birth. A special *ger* was set up, and the canteen provided food and drink. After the doctor delivered the baby, there was a mandatory 7 to 8 day rest period in another *ger* where the mother was given lessons in how to look after a newborn, raise it, feed it, and keep it clean.

YK: Was there an assistant doctor in the city who could do these all of these things?

RM: No—the doctor of the *sum* did this teaching. There was one hospital among the *sums* with more than ten doctors, as well as a crèche and a kindergarten whose teachers could offer such lessons. The doctor could visit the *gers* by car and teach the mothers. The mid wife/obstetrician and the *sum* administration secretaries had to decide who would take the mother who held the baby in her arms back home. It was very important that the *sum* had set up both a crèche and a kindergarten.

All the children of the *sum* personnel attended the crèche or the kindergarten that the *negdel* provided with food and drink and where there were games and toys.

Much attention was paid to the young, and later in life their weddings were held in the *gers* or in the wedding palaces where the marriage certificates were issued and feasts were enjoyed. The *negdel* made special wedding *deels* that were given free of charge to the bride and groom.

3.13. The Dairy Industry

We constructed a building in the “Ikh Tanir” *sum* center for the dairy industry, and Mongolia’s dairy industry was world famous. In a year, the Mongolian dairy industry produced 40 tons of butter from 120 tons of dairy products, which had to be differentiated into 12 dairy foods. There are several kinds of the so-called “shar toc” (yellow fat) or butter that is 100 % fat. These include yellow fat, white fat “ezgi” or the fat found in curds. There is a kind of curds, “aruul,” that is sweet and is called “white curds” for which “Ikh Tamir” is famous. Also included in the 10 best known types of curds are the everyday curds, the wormlike curds, and the curds from naturally soured skim milk. The pot used for making the curds was also used to distill spirits from the material left over in the pot, and nothing was wasted in this distilling process. Another vessel, which can make 3 liters of good spirits is also used to make *airagh* or koumiss. A residue called “tsagaa” remains after the curds have been made which is strained and then mixed again with some milk to make more curds. We Mongolians have been herding and making these dairy products for over 2000 years. Our *negdel*, with support from the Party and the State, decided to develop the dairy products industry because Mongolians continually demand them.

YK: Where was such food sold?

RM: A big store had been built in the *sum* center, but people can pass right by “Ikh Tamir” and die without [seeing] dairy products.

IL: “Ikh Tamir” is certainly in the westernmost *aimag*.

RM: Yes—absolutely and it is on the main road. People with few herds carry out their duties in the *sum* center where there are a school, a crèche, and a kindergarten. Some people came to town to work at the store in the *aimag* center, which was easy work. There were also difficulties in the *negdel* food industry. One troublesome problem was that Mongols like their spirits and each day 10,000 liters of milk products were produced and 10,000 liters of milk were made into *airagh*. One room could hold 10 large drums or barrels to ferment 10,000 liters of milk—8 to 9 liters at a time—to make cheese from which spirits were the by-products. Making these spirits, which were very strong because of the low water content, was hard work for the Mongols. Altogether, 10 tons of Mongolian spirits were made. However, no real decision had been reached to make or sell spirits that were by-products from the manufacture of curds. Since it was a Mongolian custom to never throw away spirits, they were stored in an enormous vat. I proposed that instead of spilling out the drink that it could be made into an alcohol based cleaning solution.

The President of the Academy was Mr. B. Shirendev,²⁹⁾ and I sent him a petition. He assembled all sorts of learned people who made spirits. The Mongolian dairy industry was built near the site of spirit production, which needed to raise the heat to ninety-four degrees for the best quality spirits. A spirit factory had to meet a standard, so a professional was invited to make blends that included “Milk Spirits,” “Twice Distilled Spirits,” and a drink supposedly distilled four times. The milk spirits were made at the same temperature as vodka and produced “arz” (twice distilled) and “khorz” (4 times distilled spirits) which were very popular. The spirits made at the state *negdel* factory were 10 % cheaper than other spirits. Vodka cost 15 *tugriks*, but ours was 25 percent cheaper, and a glass of spirits cost 17 *tugriks*, which was 8 *tugriks* cheaper. All in all, the State-produced vodka was popular, and our spirits quickly sold, so our income increased. In the end, then, the production of spirits was a side product of our dairy production, and there was talk whenever R. Minjuur’s income from spirits rose.

At the beginning, we didn’t establish such a goal for the production of spirits since they were produced from the manufacture of *aruul* or cheese. However, it was good to make these spirits, and I took the initiative or one might say “fools rush in.” So I gave great thought to the organization of the workers—what they should eat and drink, what they should wear, and how to provide them with housing. Our young people also had to be provided with

food, drink, and a hall with light music in which they could rest and dance as they did most of their work in the morning.

3.14. The Electric Station

Our Youth League, it is said, demonstrates that “the young can move mountains and can also make water run uphill.” Our *negdel* built “a cultural palace” for our young herders with a museum, a library, and a movie theater. There was light music throughout the complex and a teacher of electric music (stereo?). At the *sum* center, there were two diesel stations that were kept lighted. There was no other energy power in the *sum*, and the *negdel* lit itself. To pay for it, nine people worked at one station, with three people on duty keeping the diesel station alight for twenty-four hours.

The people who worked at the diesel station were given a salary in accordance with the regulations. It was essential to be economical with the electricity. Professionals carefully followed diagrams on the placement of the electric lines, and there was a question if the dairy industry would have a line. There was some guesswork, and sometimes the lines were put down rather arbitrarily. In another *sum* center, they caught fire which was very frightening. Each member of the “Gerelt Zam” *negdel* was given an individual salary, and there was no loan, no state subsidy, or debt. People from home and abroad admired how guests were treated. How good was this *negdel*? How good was the food? Were the members of the *negdel* attractive and decent? Our hotel was modeled on an elegant *ger*. A guest entered the hotel through the wooden door and went into a large beautiful *ger* that was decorated in the Mongolian national spiral pattern. The guests were treated well when they spent the night. So thanks to this man, a hero would be made.

3.15. Labor Hero as *Negdel* Leader

YK: Exactly when were you a Labor Hero?

RM: In 1969, I became a Labor Hero. At the time there was not much of a history of the *sum* and *negdel*, so our Ikh Tamir *sum*/ Gerelt Zam *negdel* wrote our story but not for the money. In addition, it must be said that a person who doesn't know his history cannot write it by guessing. A person must know the archival material of history and make use of every book he can in his writing. Very interesting things were written in this history of the Ikh Tamir *sum negdel*, which R. Minjuur, himself, undertook to write. Later, leader Tsendenbal spoke about this history of the *sum negdel* at a big meeting. So the history was conceived and finished, and many other things were initiated. The young people had a celebration at which they danced and galloped on horseback while looking after the sheep. There was dancing in the

hall to phonograph music that the young enjoyed enormously. In this way “our cultural leader” was created, and our youth were educated.

3.16. The Settlement Policy

RM: The policy of the government regarding the *negdels* changed as the socialist economy grew. The *negdels* constructed herders’ settlements and a farm and set up a brigade. The good herders had to constantly settle in the spring, summer, and autumn pastures.

YK: Did the more settled herders have a problem with this life on the move? Was there a policy about building a cultural palace and a dairy processing plant for the herders?

RM: Recently, there have been studies and experiments in Inner Mongolia pertaining to this. However, our *negdel* had not been satisfied with the research on centralization, and there had been talk about some of these grievances. Nevertheless, as a result of the study, the quality of the pastures improved, and there was an increase in a better breed of animals. Through cross breeding some sheep, a finer type of wool was produced, and the sheep could be sheared and their wool compacted electronically. In addition, there was a trend toward mechanization and electrification on the milk farms, so the herds could be milked by machine. The plants and industries on the *negdel* were improved, and though we produced sufficient meat and wool we did not become complacent and continued to increase our output. We had the same production goals with our chickens, pigs, bees, hares, and geese, and so knew we were following the right policy. Some *negdels* built their winter quarters in the *sum* centers since there was an agreement to maintain a home even during the summer migration. So it was agreed to have the mechanization, electrification and the “red corner” (i.e., recreation room) in the *sum* center where families could be gathered together on one farm with 150 to 200 cows, a crèche for every 10 families, and a kindergarten for every 30 children. Although some farms had 40 children, the kindergarten and the crèche could jointly use a building. The children of the milkers could go to the kindergarten or to the crèche, and their families could pick them up at the end of the day. Several experiments were tried. For example, with a lot of work, a settlement was built at Ar Ereg farm, with its own crèche and kindergarten. Some *negdels* and farms tried to implement their own policies, but little by little they moved toward centralization, which sometimes reduced the settlements. We, however, moved away from these individual settlements. Each settlement had to create reserves of food and hoped to plant vegetables and produce mixed feed and food pellets for the animals. In so doing, the quality of food for the herds improved, as did the lives of the people in these settlements. A

major influence on the migration in the herding economy must also be mentioned, and this entailed paying attention to peoples' health and focusing, especially, on improving the care of mothers and children. In addition, more work had to be done to make newspapers, mail service, and radio and television more available. We had many things to do before we could catch up with the Russians, including providing every family with a transistor radio—essential in the lives of the herders—and each *negdel* leader with a YA3-469 car. Our “older brothers” (i.e., the Russians) were certainly a strong and cultured support of us Mongolians.

YK: Could the *negdel* remain the same in this sort of community? There was a time when the young were joined to their elders like a younger brother to his older brother, and people seemed to belong to one big family. So did the *negdel* settlement grow up alongside the community as it had in the past?

RM: The community was the basic settlement, and as it increased the herds were classified into groups that also increased. This form of community became more comfortable for everyone, and our older people, who could not go to the winter quarters or lived alone, were provided for. So *negdel* members and those who were able to work had to urge families to centralize, so the economy could thrive. In time, the elderly became accustomed to State assistance/pension, and the *negdel* herders received salaries but for a while, private property owners did not get a stipend. During pregnancy and at the time of a death in the family, money was presented to the herders, which was most helpful. After the *negdels* declined, however, everyone was on their own. Now we lack those socially protective measures, and we need to discuss returning to this system of co-operative united *negdels*.

4. My Life Changes

4.1. The Herders' Cultural Palace

After I. R. Minjuur became a *negdel* member, I was made a Labor Hero and followed the policy of doing something for the youth. D. Renchin worked in Ulaan Baatar when he was young and was the leader of ten workers. Dambin Renchin went with them to observe the buildings in the city. They visited the art institute and saw the artwork. At the time there was a “Herders' Palace of Culture” which was doing some work. “The Herders' Palace of Culture” was not just a technical term and during the revolutionary period contained a red corner (recreation room) and a club. We decided to call this “The Herders' Cultural Palace” for want of a better title. When it was built we distributed the information.

This cultural palace became D. Renchin's model, and he was responsible for building it. At that time, the “Star Movie Theater” was to be built, and we

met with the engineers who would build it. We studied the design and planned to construct this cultural palace that would have mass appeal. There were many talks about limiting the cost, and the plans were then given to the State Institute of Architecture where I knew many of the engineers. They studied this plan that included the plan for the “Star Movie Theater.” They rejected our plan as unmanageable and urged us not to be discouraged and to come up with another plan which devoted special attention to some of the beams that we had made too long for proper drainage. If the buildings were badly made, there was the fear that they would collapse although each was considered to be quite well designed. The walls were to be made from blocks of material from Arkhangai *aimag*, and I spoke with ten other decisive people about the building. The State Institute of Architecture did not ask for a payment for their rather pricey plan, so we gave them some dairy products. Before we actually started building, we had to take into consideration environmental issues. Russia and Mongolia worked co-operatively in an industry in the Bayankhongor *aimag* center to create building materials. This industry provided and transported the surface panels for a large hospital that was being constructed in the center of Arkhangai. A Russian man called Sasha worked in this Bayankhongor industry, and I became friends with him. Through him, we had a crane place these surface panels. Engineers built the “Star Movie Theater” quite precisely although an accounting error concerning a broken beam unfortunately led to the death of three older men. We discussed the handling of these beams and decided that we had to set in place a strong steel foundation to cement the beams to the base. Thus the beams were made very strong so they would not break. Many people from the *sum* center who were unemployed worked on this building and 28 tons of all sorts of metal were used for the foundation. There were large plumbing industries in both Darkhan and Erdenet, and the director of the Darkhan city plumbing industry was a child of an Ikh Tamir man named Lkhagvasuren. This man offered us 17 to 18 tons of different grades of pipes for the metal foundation. 3 or 4 machines loaded up the metal, and the Russian and Mongolian directors gave us 2 loads and took no payment. As the building was going up, I gave them some fermented milk drinks that had served as a symbol of prosperity to the Mongolians. You should go and have a look over there.

We always carried cultural programs at the “Herders’ Cultural Palace” and whenever possible there was art in the auditorium. Some artists who wished to take part in performances were organized by the *negdels*. The library had 4,000 to 5,000 volumes, and readings were held in the auditorium. Tibetan books were collected, by and large, from the lamas at Ikh Tamir who knew the Tibetan language and read many books themselves. The library also contained

the great Mongolian-Tibetan sutra book. The Palace also set up a good area museum that made Ikh Tamir's history famous. In addition, a newspaper for young people and industrial workers was established. At the entrance to this Palace, there was a mural of the Tamir River made from inlaid stones.

We had neglected to find chairs in all of our struggles to build this Cultural Palace. The Mongols do not make good chairs, and we do not have any of the best type of bentwood chairs. Then a Russian fellow whose name I do not remember came from the Cultural Embassy in the Buryat Soviet Socialist Republic to our *negdel*. He was very interested in our "Herders' Cultural Palace" and set about teaching many of our herders how to build chairs that would not collapse. He stayed about two days and left. When he returned, we gave him a gift of a horse head fiddle, a 4 stringed bowed instrument, a flute, a zither and a 3 stringed plucked instrument, all of which had been used and were quite old. The "Herders Cultural Palace" was devoted to collecting these musical instruments, as was the Russian for his own cultural palace in Buryatia. He asked me if we needed anything for our Palace and invited me to visit him. I told him we could use 250 chairs though, in fact, our auditorium had only 150 seats.

I had been invited to go to Ulaan Ude³⁰) with him, so I could learn about all of this. He told me that, as a gift, I could take back with me 300 chairs from Ulaan Ude's big wood and furniture factory, which I knew about. Thus I loaded the chairs onto the train on my return. Such was his contribution to our Palace. Those chairs, however, have now been replaced by those made in the Tocontsengel wood processing industry.

I finished the work on the Palace and handed it over to the *negdel*. Then a rumor circulated that the Palace Minjuur had built had collapsed. We had, however, discussed the construction of the foundation with Choijilsuren, the engineer, who said that it is quite rare that the foundation would break or crack and the building would fall down. The people you have talked with have, unfortunately, made up stories. This structure will not fall down—at least not so far—and we haven't even put in the floor! When we pour the cement, people will see how nice the Palace is and so will the newspapers.

R. Badnaa was a very good carpenter on our *negdel* and made the wooden doors and put in each window by himself. Most people could not do that alone. I helped him gather the materials, and he cut the wood outside finishing each window that remained in place throughout the whole year. These windows were especially necessary in winter and summer. The carpenter was very artistic, and his methods were amazing. We spoke at great length about the shape and pattern of the doors. At the time, many doors in Ulaan Baatar, like those at the Youth Hotel and the government palace, were

elegantly made with a slat. So I said we should have such a door with a copper cover on the outside. However, the carpenter did not quite understand this, so one Saturday I took him around Ulaan Baatar to study the doors. One old man we met had all the tools for making such a door, and we saw some model—one with a window in it. Today the young people know nothing about this and have never seen a door with a window.

When I saw this door with the window, I thought to myself that this fine and intelligent carpenter had made this strong and well crafted door with a window. Generally, Mongolian carpenters and smiths work only with their hands and put their minds to whatever they do. This carpenter called Natsag—the crafty one—made many doors each year along with the artist Badnaavanchin who fashioned the windows. Both men came from Ikh Tamir and were members of my *negdel*, and I made sure they received a good salary for this work. What a shame that the man who made the window for the Cultural Palace is now a poor old man. However, we provided him with good food and drink. We also asked him if he needed anything, and he told us that he wanted some particular grass to crumble into tea that grew in Bayankhongor *aimag*. If he drank that tea for a week, he would stay strong for a year! So I went to Bayankhongor *aimag* to get this grass for the old man. The Cultural Palace was finished, and the tenth leader, Renchin, awarded the Pole Star medals and the Honored Labor medals to a young girl, Mr. Badnaavanchin, and Mr. Natsag. The message from the Party and the government read: “Our *negdel* members have built a Palace of Culture for the herding people. This has been written in a certificate, and now they must be well rewarded.” There were many cheers. “R. Minjuur must also be rewarded. The “Herders Cultural Palace” is done.” Thank you.

IL: Recently, red brick buildings have been constructed in the city, but the plans are poor, and so is the style of the building.

RM: The newspapers have written about this. One building is awful and looks like a bird’s nest. Yes.

4.2. The Work of Planting Vegetables

It is interesting to recall the years between 1940 and 1950 when vegetables were planted but were not eaten or used. The Party and government then decided to assign planting vegetables to the *negdels* and State Farms. So I began to plant potatoes on the “Victory” *negdel* in Mörön *sum*, as I have mentioned. Arkhangai was the first *aimag* to plant potatoes, and there was an abundant crop. However, no one was able to sell these potatoes, even when we sold them at 35 *mung* a kilogram. We, therefore, had to find some sort of storage cellar because without good storage facilities the potatoes could easily

rot. We also thought that perhaps we could give them away or even give them to the *negdel* members as their daily wages. However, the *negdel* folk were not accustomed to eating potatoes and didn't want them. These potatoes were a real nuisance!

Today, however, the Mongols plant potatoes and other vegetables that fetch a high price. The onions are Russian onions. I wonder why that is since they are not the best onions, and the wild Mongolian onion grows very well in the countryside and the *khangai*. The Mongols generally eat them and do not like the cultivated onions that have a bitter taste. They also do not like turnips and carrots. So we went back to planting potatoes. It takes a lot of work to produce them for eating, and we had the difficult task of explaining how to eat and enjoy them. Now there is a lot of talk about a green revolution, and each family grows potatoes in its *khashaa*. So now planting potatoes has become a part of our working lives, and people are doing well with these potatoes. In fact, everyone is now eating vegetables in both the town centers and the countryside where the herders eat this "green food" that is good for the health. When there is proper care and preservation, people can sell their vegetables since people now buy them. In the past, "grandfather" might fill his saddle bags with potatoes just to give them away, but now people are accustomed to eating vegetables, so raising them is a part of our lives. Isn't it? A Vegetable Grower talking to Yuki.

RM: This Japanese Professor is interviewing me, and I can only say that growing vegetables is normal, though that was not the case in the past.

4.3. Bread

YK: When did the Mongols begin to eat bread?

RM: We have only begun to eat bread recently. In the past the herder in the countryside did not eat bread. It was said that when flour rises and is puffed up in shape it has an unpleasant bitter taste. So it was quite a lot of work to become accustomed to eating bread. Still, a bread factory was built in Ulaan Baatar, and people in the city began to eat bread. There was a man when I was young who baked bread, and he put some of this horrible bread on a plate for his family. It was very bad, and people wondered how it could be given to his family. By 1960, however, eating bread became more popular and had spread to the countryside. Now we can't live without vegetables and bread. In fact, without two liters of these, life is very hard.

At first, there were disputes about the bread factory. At that time, the standard weight for bread was one kilogram, and government supervisors inspected the factory making sure that each loaf was not short, even 40 to 50 grams in weight. If even one loaf of bread was deficient, the factory was

heavily fined. Such were the regulations in the early days—now there are none.

Growing fruit became an issue much later. In the 1950s and 1960s, the apple was unknown in Mongolia. It takes a lot of work to raise apples, and now they come from abroad. Most of our tea comes from China, but the poor people, generally in the countryside, drink a natural plant drink. In fact, nature provides the cornflowers from which to make a tea.

4.4. Russian Tea

YK: When did people start drinking Russian tea?

RM: In the 1930s. In 1932, we encountered Russian tea and Russian tobacco and pipe tobacco. Until then, we had only smoked Chinese pipe tobacco. We could drink the Russian tea, but the Russian pipe tobacco was very nasty to smoke. The quality of Russian pipe tobacco is horrible, and it is said that it smells of horse dung. Those times were different. We country people had become accustomed to being treated with Tibetan medicine, and then a Russian and a European doctor arrived. Each *bag* was then given a course in sanitation from the doctors in the *sum* centers. At the time, people would not take Russian medicine, perhaps because the monks had persuaded the old people not to take it, saying it was bad for the body. So the Party and the government met with the Russian doctor to propagandize and present a better image of Russian medicine. At that time, venereal disease was a problem in Mongolia, and the ill were among the first to be treated with streptomycin which we called the “red immunization” because the venereal disease colored the urine red. People did not like it, but their chronic venereal disease got better. In the end, people began to praise this immunization program, and we young people in the military were inoculated against venereal disease. And we also drank the Russian tea, but now one can drink Chinese tea or “red tea,” which is however poorly regarded. People can also smoke Chinese pipe tobacco that has a greasy, scorching smell and is very bad for the lungs.

YK: Was there rice?

RM: There was rice, but it was quite rare and was generally eaten only by the lamas. One family only ate about 2 kilograms of rice, so you can see it was very rare.

YK: And flour?

RM: Long ago, the Mongols did not have flour, it was very rare and came from the Chinese. In the 1950s, the Mongols grew wheat and then began to make flour. The Chinese produced “Beautiful Path” and “Light Path” flour. But most people did not use flour, and people didn’t eat many foods made from it. In the religious services of exorcism and salvation, the lamas ate bowls of

meat and flour. Now everyone eats flour foods and enjoys them.

4.5. Dairy Food

(Still in the food market) There is yellow-whitish fat from which we get butter. If it is all white, the fat content is low. The Mongolian butter is deep yellow. For 2000 years a Mongolian has been able to eat butter from the milk of his own herds.

“This dried cheese is not called *aruul*; it is a cheese called *khuruud* that is made from soured skimmed milk. Another famous product is *orom* or clotted cream. In the 1950s and 1960s, a milking machine was introduced from abroad for making butter and sour cream, which we had not made before this. We made clotted cream, so *smetana* is a recent product.

There is also the residue from boiled and dried milk. There is also sweet or sugared *aruul* or cheese that is enjoyed by families in the country side. They say “*ezgi* and *aruul* in a leather bag and *orom* in a koumiss sack.” People in Ulaan Baatar say the production of these products, which are sent abroad, make up what is called the “white revolution”.

“It is hard to make clotted cream in the cooking pot because it is too warm. Yak milk from a chilly area is thick and results in good clotted cream. There is a type of national cooking pot for this clotted cream. *Buuz* (dumplings) are served at our national feasts and on ceremonial occasions when good food is served. When we were young, we didn’t have any flour, so families did not eat *buuz*.

4.6. The Old City

The first four story building was being constructed in Ulaan Baatar when we were building our “Herders’ Cultural Palace.” The Party and government leaders held a ceremony for those who participated in laying the foundation. It was started in 1930 and since there were no construction groups at that time the lamas who had been arrested and imprisoned did most of the building. Some of these lamas were skilled, and others had been exiled. Those who were detained did the construction, and Dashtseveg was supported in his artistic and creative work. After the building was finished, several of these lamas were exonerated and avoided prison. Such is history. Lenin and Stalin are prominent in considering this issue. Recently many have been affected by this. Beyond these buildings were the palisades, and our *khashaa* and *ger* were on the near side of the building. Straight ahead were the *khashaas* of other families. This street was called “Water Street” because Chinese horse carts carried water along it. Now in Höhhot and Beijing a person can see such water carts. “To the market! To the market!” was the cry and a ride cost 30

mung. Today there is a market near the station, and many people take horse carts there. Such is the story of the building. Later more buildings were constructed, and though there was no new building nearby I knew that there soon might be.

4.7. Zaisan

It was a place away from the railroad and buildings and close to, but not on the side of, the market where the Naadam fair was held. At that time, all building materials were transported from Ulaan Ude, mostly when the weather was warm. The Russian ZIC5 car was also used for transport because there was no major transport base. Only recently were these bases built. The railroad would transport building materials in winter and summer.

Now we can go alongside the “Sacred Green Palace” which is in the area of the spa (waters) and is called the “People’s Medical Institute.” The number of *gers* for the old or the ill has increased over the years. A camp was built in the summer and “camp leaders” were appointed.

Nowadays the “Bogd Lamasery” in Ulaan Baatar is different and smaller. The Gandan Monastery is near the Janraisig and many other monasteries. There were families at the north side of the “Dambadarjagin” lamasery, and in the center of the city there were many green trees near the “Dashchoinlon” lamasery which was the model for many other lamaseries. The four lamaseries were the “Bogd Khuree,” the “Dambadarjagin,” the “Dashchoinlon” and the “Gandantegchinlin.” On the east side, many families surrounded the Amgalan, which was the center of Chinese trade and their only place of business. The Lenin Museum was set up here on what was Chinese Ninth Street, while the Chinese were generally concentrated in another area near the “Bogd Lamasery” where they did not live in *gers* but in clay houses. Twenty-one years after the People’s Revolution, the Russians built the “High Co-op” that has now become the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts. The present day Mongol Bank building was built quite early and was originally small until it was extended. The present day Ministry of Interior building was also built around that time, but today the building is a Teachers’ College. Marshal Choibalsan lived in the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party/Central Committee building which is to the side. In the 1930s School Number One became the first four story building to be constructed. Later, the largest building was the Mongolian State University. There was a lot of building near the railroad, and there were several *gers* in a place called “Springing Water.” At the time, a bridge had not yet been built over the Tuul River.

In fact, there were no bridges over the Tuul River which in those days was very large. Now it is very small. The source of the Tuul River is in the

Zaan Terelj range, so the river should flow with a great deal of water. Ulaan Baatar needs wood from the Zaan Terelj range, but there were few technical machines then, so the wood was gathered from the trees along the Tuul River, and then was loaded onto a raft for transport to Ulaan Baatar where it was sold from the back of horse carts and pushcarts. The Chinese also sold loads of coal from Nalaikh, even though not too many people burned coal. Generally the Chinese used a small amount of the coal themselves in a carpenter's and smith's workshop near "The Blacksmith's Bridge." Only wood was burned in the city, which had been collected from the trees along the banks of the Tuul River and transported by raft.

IL: I have heard that there was a military call-up when fighting broke out in the East. Where was the military camp for your group?

RM: There was the railroad cultural palace and the auto transport base called "Mongol-trans." In 1935 in Arkhangai, I was called up for the relay that crossed Shar Khoviin Pass and went down to Songinot corner. We spent the night at "Mongoltrans" and then departed for who knows where—I don't even remember. We took a horse from Nalaikh, but I don't really know much about this horse relay. The "Mongoltrans" used solia fuel which at one point started to smoke and make a terrific noise when the vehicle went here and there to some *aimag*. In 1945, which is quite a while ago, I had come to the Ministry of Interior and at that time it was the only building in that area. Now the Natural History Museum and a hospital are nearby.

4.8. The Relay

YK: Please talk about the relay.

RM: If you owned private herds, you would, once or twice a year, be excluded from the relay. There were 30 kilometers between the relay families, and each family prepared about 100 horses and served the relay for a month at a time. It was compulsory for each rider to serve the relay for a month as well. The relay was organized a long time ago, and those who rode it were issued travel documents by their *sum* or *aimag*. With this document, the rider was given the authority to ride and without it there was no authorization to participate in the relay. There were two types of travel documents: the "red document" and the "green document" and, in fact the first was red and the second green. The "red document" is what an ambassador or leader carries nowadays and is like a passport for a diplomat abroad. With this document, the relay carrier was never hindered and when he arrived at the camp someone else, who had been appointed, saddled up his horse. This rider with the "red document" had the rights of leaders and ambassadors, while those with the "green document" had the privileges of an ordinary worker. A four to five person *ger* was built for

the relay riders, which they put up themselves, and both categories of documented relay participants were fed and given meat. They spent the night on long narrow mattresses and covered themselves with their *deels*. People always wore the Mongolian *deel* on the relay, which in winter was made of fur. The documents the riders carried gave them free lodging, but they had to pay for these documents. Thus the riders needed a salary to cover their expenditures for ten relays and were paid three to eight *tugriks* for riding one horse. Including the preparation, one rode for thirty kilometers before dismounting.

Each *sum* divided up the responsibility for the relay. In Arkhanghai *aimag* Chooloo *sum* and Ikh Tamir *sum* shared the responsibility for those traveling the relay. Each *sum* was in charge of certain responsibilities. For example, “in November Dorjinkh rode thirty days on the relay. He was assigned to bring twenty-one horses and two *gers*! In that time period, as it was written, the horses had to be driven and the *gers* loaded. Saddles and bridles were not given to the riders, so each relay rider had to provide his own. If the rider was delayed, he was fired. In 1949, however, the horse relay was replaced by a fast “courier service.” The government or the Ministry of the Interior appointed someone who had the great responsibility of establishing the strict requirements for each *aimag* and *sum*. When someone demanded “get this document there in two weeks,” a rider, wearing a special hat that made him recognizable, would have to ride day and night since it was announced that the message was en route. Horses were changed and saddled up, tea was placed in the middle of the saddle, and *aruul* and *ezgi* were put in the pockets. The rider avoided delay by not spending the night and followed instructions on where to go. Other relay riders went at their own leisurely pace.

We mail riders carried the “red documents” and were given a saddle and horse and were advised never to put the saddle on the ground. A person with a “red document” was authorized to eat one leg of meat. He had to boil this one leg—either a thigh or a forequarter which came from between the shoulder and the knee. He set out after eating and was inexhaustible. Such were the rules. The “Victory” *negdel* in Mörön *aimag* was on the mail route.

RM: Are you going to Gachuurt?

IL: Now it is evening. We will go tomorrow morning and come back at noon.

RM: Shall we visit a family in the countryside tomorrow?

IL: Sure.

RM: Gachuurt is 27 to 28 kilometers away, and one must go on a dirt road for 20 kilometers. The roundtrip is about 100 kilometers. The Gachuurt *sum* center is beyond a ravine. Our two younger brothers are there, and you can see

them distill koumiss and eat Mongolian dairy food. They will also slaughter a sheep, so we can eat the stomach. If we do go and see my two younger brothers, we can drink a lot of Mongol spirits and home brew. I can take this occasion to go with you to see my brothers and drink milk tea. They have two cows and two sheep and will prepare the meat. We can rest a bit and chat. See you tomorrow morning at 9. It isn't far but a bit of a nuisance without a car.

5. Gachuurt State Farm (One Day Later)

IL: Today we can start discussing the differences between the *negdel* and the State farm. Talk a bit about the creation of the State farm and the *negdel* and the mechanization of farming.

RM: In socialist times, the State farm and the *negdel* were both very large enterprises. I have already spoken about the *negdel*, and now we are going to a State farm. This Gachuurt State farm is very famous among the 18 or 19 national State farms.

Both the State farms and the *negdel* produce for the rural economy, but work on principles that are quite different from the private economy.

The *negdel* members are organized voluntarily and gain their wealth from their labors. The work on the State farm is organized directly from the State budget and emphasizes raising crops and herds. Along with many crops and plants, grain for flour is grown on the State farm, and the money earned goes to the State. The herding economy is also profitable, and the money from the abundant milk is collected by the State to pay out subsidies. The *negdel* works for the money itself, and the State does not watch over it. Thus the *negdels* are responsible for improving their lives themselves.

5.1. Mechanizing the Milk Farms

The State farms were mechanized farms while the rural *negdels* were, by and large, not mechanized farms. So now we will go and visit this important mechanized farm in Gachuurt. This farm has its own steam furnace and a mechanized building for cows where the cow and the calf in the first year spend the winter. This barn is heated, and the animal filth is cleaned with fresh water. The animals are fed well, the steam furnace works, and people are taught important ways to prepare the milk on the mechanized State farm. There were about 16 mechanized State farms around Ulaan Baatar city where the milk is processed.

Black and white cows spent the winter at the Gachuurt mechanized State farm. But with democracy came privatization so the herds were equally distributed to *negdel* herders. Things were very straightforward on the State farm, and if a person had the money, he could engage in private trade. Finally,

all the property on the State farms and *negdels* was dispersed, and now these State farms do not exist. Bayanzurkh is a district that is in a suburb of Ulaan Baatar with the administration in the Gachuurt district. Workers there are not under any jurisdiction, so all the economy is private. One person has a mechanized farm that he acquired with his own money, and though I do not know how he bought it, perhaps foreigners or the Chinese helped him. Let's say a person sells his cows, so there are no cows left since they have all been privatized. Then there are no more cows and no more equipment for the electric milking and feeding machines. Each item is now traded separately, and the building, itself, is left for scrap. Some places have been dismantled and the bricks sold. Still one must follow the democratic path, and such things had to be done. But all this privatization was done in the wrong way, and much of the property and wealth has been squandered. And today Ulaan Baatar city needs milk! In some areas, people use milking machines and transport their milk in cars, while those without cars use horse carts to transport their milk. One family, for example, had two milk cans while the farm once had several machines for the morning milking and a truck that could carry three tons of milk to the city to process in the huge milk processing plant. This was a good way to collect the milk, but privatization has had a bad effect because the democratic party privatized in the wrong way. If we had copied Inner Mongolia, our privatization experience would have been better, and the lease for Dorjids' farm would have stated that the cows were to be kept. Milking methods should be as they were. There are so many first year calves to raise and cows to look after. And now the State has introduced monetary measures into the contract so there can be personal gain. Unfortunately, the lease was not drawn up properly so everything has been sold.

Democracy has led to great wealth, and there are many rich Mongolians whose chests heave! The *negdels* distributed the government's mandates which included an appraisal of the collectivized herds in order to divide them. The herds were then driven off, and the *negdels* were ruined. There were no herds. At Ikh Tamir two people were given one *khashaa*, which they divided and then took a saw to the fences. So this is what the cow farm is like now. There has been democracy for ten years and these things have been done. The industrial economy, which was based on boots, skins, furs, and milk, was in the same situation as the *negdel* and the collective. The person who bought the milk farm then put it up for sale to anyone who would buy it, which was very unpleasant. Privatization has led to many mistakes that affected, especially, the Mongolian poor. The government has the slogan: "Let's end the government deficit and end poverty." If the government had been wiser, we would not be in this situation. There were 250 mechanized cow farms, and the cows came

from various parts of Kazakhstan. In Russia, people kept the farms that remained productive. We are youngsters in democracy. The leaders of the Great Khural were R. Gonchigdorj and Da. Ganbold and with E. Bat-Uul;³¹⁾ they were harbingers of our democracy. They were, however, immature and did some bad things. The herders demanded winter, spring, and summer pastures. Since the cows were not killed in the winter, they had to be fed and needed a steam heated building with a boiler.

The *negdel* was near the milk farm where the cows were scattered, but the *negdel* could not mechanize and generally milking was done by hand. We had many yaks, and the yaks and cows averaged three liters of milk a day. The milk had a lot of fat. Hybrid cows produced 15 to 20 liters a day—quite a lot of milk but with less fat. Ulaan Baatar was overflowing with milk, and one liter cost 50 *mung*. Now milk costs 600 *tugriks*. What a difference. There was no need for compulsory mechanization of the milk farms.

A foreigner prepares to speak:

RM: How can all this be better?

Foreigner: I don't know how to stimulate things here. I am just waiting.

RM: Are you and other people looking to privatize things?

Foreigner: There is the invisible problem of bankruptcy in this country.

RM: I have heard much talk that one must get a loan. It is essential to revive the poultry economy. It is hard to get credit today unless you know someone. Money is only given according to the whim of the dealer. Many *tugriks* have been given for chicken and eggs, and many people are working on this but they need support. Actually, there is a small building for chickens and eggs, and people who are unemployed can unite and work there. The State and the government financial organizations must grant loans, but it would be a mistake to give loans for everything. Do you get loans?

Foreigner: No—usually not.

RM: Are you following up on this?

Foreigner: It is useless to follow up on getting a loan. It is a waste of time.

RM: Not really. One must do that to get support for the chicken and egg enterprises we talked about.

Foreigner: At least we wouldn't eat eggs from Inner Mongolia.

RM: Indeed. We now import eggs from Höhhot. If people eat our eggs, then the business can be saved, and the eggs will gain in value—but no loan will be given.

5.2. The End of Mechanizing the Milk Farms

RM: We saw 250 milk farms in the spring. The cows were calving and were in good condition for the New Year. They intended to build spring quarters

with a large building and a *khashaa*. There was no steam and therefore no heat. At least the buildings were freshly built and would not be buried by the snow. There was a building where the cows could calve, and there were veterinarians as well. At the time of privatization, the farm broke up, and the spring quarters were abandoned. Quite a few famous people came both from outside and inside Mongolia. There was a guard, but the foreigners and the local people moved on their own into these buildings where the cows were, and each family took 10 and 20 cows, which had been the foundation of the mechanized state cow farm. Now all of this was privatized, and the families owned the cows. The large animals were no longer collectivized, and prestigious people came to do business. Now there is nothing inside the spring quarters built for the 250 cows, machines have been abandoned, and everything else has been robbed and taken. This mechanized farm was built with credit from the Russians to whom we are somewhat indebted. We will not repay this debt. Maybe V. Putin will forgive it or he might say “ugh” to us or get angry. Privatization makes demands, and some of its methods are wrong. Perhaps instead of privatizing, a type of lease could be arranged, so there could be profits as there were in times past. The economy worked well then.

5.3. The Possibilities of the *Negdels*

The summer pastures are beyond here. In socialist times, the State gave out grants so that everyone in the *negdels* could profit. In fact, the *negdels* made a profit. The State farms had State grants and earned a profit from the abundance of milk and crops. The grants were understood to be loans, so the money really had to be returned though there was no interest on these loans. The State farms had a budget of 10,000,000 *tugriks* for the spring, which was to be repaid without interest in the fall. The *negdels* also took out loans, but only a few were awarded stipends. All in all, the *negdels* were examples of profitability without government stipends. *Negdels* never received State stipends which encouraged their development without loans and prevented their indebtedness to the State. Such was the situation with the *negdels*.

IL: Was trade not forbidden?

RM: Generally there were impediments to even this limited trade. Free trade was difficult for the *negdels*. Nevertheless, one State *negdel* generally produced ten tons of meat. The members of the *negdels* made sure that they had a reserve supply of meat to pay for the labor days [the unit of pay for work in accounting]. The civil servant in the *sum* center knew it was not a good idea to trade in the local market, and since the meat could not be sold in stores, the *darga*, or leader, sold it in secret. Sometimes, it was difficult for the *negdels* to follow the State’s tight schedule and fulfill the plans for meat,

milk, wool, and skins. If we did not work well to fulfill the plan, it was discontinued but with a penalty. According to the plan, the State gave money for certain things which were cheaper. Although the *negdel* economy could falter, some of the herds were pretty good. The meat reserves sold quite well and covered all the expenses. Our *negdel* did not function this way. One has to live wisely and not run up a bill. Get a loan.

There were neighboring families who worked on the farm, but in the more remote areas of the Gov-Altai, Uvs, Khovd and Zavkhan *aimags* many, many families moved with their herds, thereby abandoning the State farms which had been planted. Many of these families transported their *khashaas* and buildings in order to pursue a profit. Though many families lived near the Gachuurt State Farm, these families did not put down roots in the far pastures where there were no *khashaas*, and *gers* had to be set up.

5.4. The Degradation of Nature

So what do you see? You can hardly see those nearby trees that are teeming with long green insects called locusts. There are many locusts in Western Europe and, though I don't really know, perhaps they migrated here where they destroyed our pasturelands. These locusts are very dangerous. There are two dangers in Mongolia in the summer. If these insects return next year, the trees will not grow. These trees are very dry. These green insects were abundant long ago in unusual years.

IL: This year in Övörkhongai, a lot of poison was spread around to get rid of the field mice. We talk about living with all sorts of creatures, including the field mice. What do you think?

RM: Poison is one way to abolish the field mice, but it could also prevent plant growth. However, after the mice are destroyed, the plants do grow again. Thus, it is essential to get rid of the mice and spread poison, so the insects in the trees are also killed. In fact, the poison was spread by an airplane in the forested areas. Without doing this, the insects would devour the trees. The mice did not destroy the *khangai* pastures, which are in the steppe belt.

5.5. The Conditions of *Negdel* Trade and the Market

IL: The State *negdels* had to follow the norms set by the State and fulfill the State plan. In doing this, what was the role of each *negdel* member? What did the Ikh Tamir Gerelt Zam *negdel* do about this?

RM: The State herding economy produced meat, wool, milk, hides, and sheepskin. When the national industries were built, the hides and sheepskin industries were organized to make boots and clothes from these skins. Russian leather, grained or colored leather, or Moroccan leather were important

products from the herders. There were major issues about these raw materials that were fundamental in the development of our national industry. Those in the private economy did not pay proper attention to the quality of these raw materials, so the State did not wish to use them. It was difficult for a person to do this work for the entire year, so there were regulations supporting the centralized *negdels*, which would produce the raw materials from the herding economy for the State industries.

Thus the State presented a very exacting plan that supported the *negdel's* meat and milk production and was forceful but not oppressive. In fact, this plan was supportive of the private economy. The *sum* administration was responsible for these issues, and some parts of the *negdel* were exempt from this plan that was not officially imposed under oath. Thus the *negdel* took the initiative in following the plan while also maintaining its independence. This was very difficult to do, so it had to be carefully calculated. At first, the private economy was strong but following the plan was demanding. After a while, however, the *negdels* were united and properly followed the plan which specified the quotas for the herds. I don't exactly remember the numbers but I think that large livestock had to yield 7 to 10 kilograms of meat and small livestock had to yield 4 to 5 kilograms. It was calculated that one sheep produced one kilogram, 200 grams of wool, and a goat produced 200 grams of cashmere while a cow or a horse shed, on the average, 450 grams of hair. The herds were slaughtered to meet the internal demands of the plan that included meat for schools, kindergartens, and crèches. Hides and skins were also collected according to the plan. The plan also permitted selling some meat in the market, but if the plan was not fulfilled, there could be no private sales. The personal economy was limited in the market place, but some personal herds could be sold by each family, and some families were even given herds under the plan. These measures enhanced the lives of the *negdel* members.

Recently, we recalled the mistake that the plan made in squeezing the *negdel* members too forcibly. Even today we feel that the plan led to the high cost of firewood for schools, crèches, and kindergartens. Nowadays, the high demand for raw materials that once were provided by the *negdels* has driven up the cost of products. The plan started modestly and smoothly and increased the country's output, but now the private economy is under pressure to grow. I wrote a book entitled "Wool is Gold," but it was hard to force the production of one kilogram of sheep's wool for one *tugrik* and several *mung*—never mind the hides and skins. Cow hide was worth 20 to 30 *tugriks*, sheepskin cost several *tugriks*, and goatskin cost 7 to 8 *tugriks*. A cow with a live weight of 500 kilograms was worth 200 *tugriks*—a price that was unchangeable. The government would only buy high quality meat. The herders were part of

the “Co-operative Trade and Produce Unit,” and every *sum* had these co-operative shops. It was hard to weigh and figure the fat content of each animal which had to be checked by a veterinarian for quality. The “Co-operative Trade and Procurement Unit” was directed by the Ministry of Trade and Procurement.

The first buyer was a representative from the Ministry who arrived at the “Co-operative Trade and Procurement Unit” on May 15th every year. The date was very significant because at that time the herds were very thin and had to be fattened up to make money for the State. If they were fatter, these *negdel* herds could be sold to Russia for a profit. When the animals were weighed on May 15, a sheep could weigh 30 kilograms and a cow could weigh not less than 120 kilograms. It was difficult for the State to set the right weight for the herds, many of which had become so thin during the winter. After the *negdels* paid the *dargas* their wages, they could grow rich, since 80-90% of the nation’s herds came from the *negdels*. The State kept careful accounts of the 10-20% of the *negdels*’ personal herds.

In 1921, after the People’s Revolution, the “Consumers Co-op” was established that, in a democratic economy, provided people with grain and consumer goods while the herders provided the raw materials. This Co-op became the “Co-operative Trade and Procurement Unit” and, as already mentioned, was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Trade and Procurement, which conducted trade. The animals were not collected in the settlements, and in each *aimag* there was a market for the *negdels*. The *negdels* depended on their leaders for direction and for enforcing the regulations, and the plan dictated the number of animals to be raised, how to fatten them up, and how to have a successful migration. Many animals were sold at the market and were eaten often accompanied by a lot of drinking. Sometimes, one got a better price selling the meat at the market than through the co-op.

The *negdel* might receive 70 *tugriks* for a sheep, while a person might get 100 *tugriks* selling on his own. A person who was not on the *negdel* might prefer dairy food rather than meat, even if it cost more money. *Negdel* members sold their produce for less, so there was a gap in their profits. It was generally difficult to get the *negdels*’ products to the city markets, so the teachers and doctors who worked in the *aimag* center did business with us. In addition, there was trade among the *negdels* and among their leaders. When I was in the Gobi desert, I bought some camels—maybe about 100—and we constructed a building to house them in the *khangai*. We fattened up our herds which were slaughtered in the fall, and the meat was given to a school, a kindergarten, and a crèche and to the *negdel* members themselves. What meat remained was sold, and so our *negdel* stood on its own two feet and began to

prosper. The State bought things from the *negdels* for rather low prices, so production increased and the country developed. The *negdel* leaders still got pretty good prices for their goods, and, as I mentioned before, used these profits to construct the cultural palace and other buildings.

There were both good and bad aspects to the *negdels*. The State gave the *negdel* the same stipend if the market failed, but we often wondered if there would be assistance. The government did not always help, so we were responsible for ourselves, and we had to give the *negdel* members their monthly wages. I was praised and rewarded for developing the *sum's negdel*. In fact, the socialist era provided the wisest and best situations for work. At the time of the People's Revolution in 1921, backwardness, poverty, illiteracy, and illness were rampant in Mongolia. There were very few animals, and many were sick. After seventy years, this policy has led to what is now a literate, healthy, and larger population because of the improved health care for mothers and babies. Mothers have been supported, and many children have been born, and the population has increased. There is now a mechanized cow farm that provides bread for the settlement and milk for Ulaan Baatar. These are major steps.

5.6. The Democratic Revolution

The Democratic Revolution began in 1990 though it is called a democratic movement. The young do call it a revolution, and we call it a movement. We understand a revolution is made by the people. In the context of a world revolution, we have made some mistakes: (1) There was a serious plan for change, but it was forced upon the country thus contributing to upset and (2) the number of herds that were privatized was limited—100 in the Gobi and 75 in the *khangai*—which was fairly reasonable if somewhat restricted. (3) People had questions about the trade, which had been forbidden both inside and outside the country. We only had relations with the Soviet Union, and we could not travel to or trade with many other countries. However, mistakes are hard to prevent, and people have to lead their lives. The democratic revolution changed some of these things and made it acceptable for people to speak out.

Dr. Sodnom stated it this way: “The democratic revolution made mistakes, and we were stupid.” At a short meeting, people spoke about this stupidity. D. Byambasuren said the government's biggest mistake was its methods of privatization of property. That was a major error that we can see with what was done to the spring and winter quarters at the mechanized Gachuurt State Farm, when the *negdel* herds were distributed to the herders. The many nice *khashaas*, good wells, and camel caravans were all privatized and scattered. The *khashaas* were divided up and sold. When two parties wished to privatize

a *khashaa*, the *sum* center had to step in before all the firewood was burned and the wooden buildings destroyed. These mistakes happened everywhere. He went on to say that democracy's surname could be disorder since rules were broken, and mistakes were made.

He continued to say that he needed to eat and drink and had the so-called freedom to enjoy a lot of spirits and wine since there were many bars and places of pleasure. In the central countryside, many distilleries had been built. There were many celebrations where stones were piled at all the *oboos* for worship as well as many *naadams* and games in winter and summer. All of these activities did not encourage the growth of industry since they took place in areas where there was no national industrial production. In addition, the herds and the herders on the *negdels* were abolished, and the mechanized State farms and food economy were destroyed. In addition, the Chinese benefited from all of this, and our efforts were wasted. As a result, many in our country became alcoholics and destroyed their lives. We faced a test during the winter of 1999-2000 when a small *zud* killed almost all the herds. During that winter four million animals died, which had happened only twice before in Mongolia. In 1956-7, the year of the monkey, there was a *zud* and at that time there were no *negdels*, and private ownership predominated. Four million animals also died during that winter. In 1999, four million animals died. These were the two major *zuds*. Although there were others, fewer animals died—about two million 800 thousand.

The *negdels* were growing stronger during my time. At the Ikh Tamir “Gerelt Zam” *negdel* the animals were fed with a mix of grass and bran, were kept warm in their *khashaa*, and had water from a well. When the herds were moved, a tractor helped families get grass and food in the grassy areas. Thus, the four million animals did not die. In a *zud* it was customary for many animals to die—800,000 in some *zuds* and 1,800,000 in others. Between 1956 and 1999 many animals did not die in 6 or 7 *zuds* so one may conclude that the collective economy was superior. We now have a State farm at Gachuurt, but in the ravine the private economy thrives. People have many animals on the State farm, but some died in last year's *zud*. In addition, the cattle had just been privatized so now there were no big cattle. We asked questions about this:

“Did someone come to your *sum* or *bag* when your cows died? Did a person from the state or *aimag* come?”

“No. We were abandoned with our privatized herds. There was no one to talk to.”

One family moved near Zavkhan *aimag* with 500 sheep, 2 camels, 10 cattle, and 3 or 4 horses. Then in 1999 all these animals died in the *zud*—only

about twenty sheep and goats were left. This was because there was no government committee, administration, or town division to look into this. The *negdels* had a clear position on the herding economy, so when there was a *zud* many animals were saved. I know about the economy from about 80 years ago but not before. The shortcomings of the democratic movement in 1999-2000 were very frightening to watch, and the people's government made a mistake in destroying the 700 monasteries and lamaseries, which were historical monuments. The bosses—the MPRP and Kh. Choibalsan were not responsible for this destruction. It came from foreign pressure even though J.V. Stalin was far away. Also during this period, 2000 settlement villages were destroyed in the People's Revolution.

2000 villages were gone. Like these villages, the mechanized Gachuurt State Farm, as well as 255 *negdels*, more than 10 state farms and more than 10 food enterprises were destroyed. People were not pleased with all of this. However, several people have become rich because they own private property. R. Gonchigdorj and others have run the country for ten years, and they have become wealthy through robbery and sycophancy while neglecting to look after the poor. Another mistake. The Great Khural was selected in 2000, and a year later people expressed their dislike for the President. All of this has turned out badly, so now the Revolutionary Party has been elected. Corruption, however, is still rampant, and in my opinion democracy has been a disaster. However, R. Gonchigdorj remains the leader of the biggest party, the Social Democratic, which has only one seat in the Great Khural. The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party put up 76 candidates, and 73 were elected. President N. Bagabandi was elected again, and R. Gonchigdorj, the head of the Democratic Party, was defeated. In both elections, N. Bagabandi received 70% of the vote, and Gonchigdorj received 20%. So now what is happening? Democracy is not changing, but independent individuals are being supported. It is important to establish friendly relations with foreign countries. The issue of individual wealth also needs to be discussed, as the rich are not sympathetic to the situation of the poor.

Now most of the revolutionary action has finished. The country has privatized living areas, and the herds and people ask poignantly and fearfully where we go from here. There are legal issues connected to all of this that have been discussed, and many additions and deletions to the law have been introduced in meetings, and the land question has been brought up again. The Democratic Party wants to privatize the land, but not all agree. The pioneer of the democracy movement, E. Bat-Uul, spoke on television recently:

“I have been abroad on a holiday, and I was busy when I came back. We prepared slogans and had a demonstration and realized that the government

was not going to usurp the law that was approved by the Great Khural. Such were the demonstrations of the democracy movement. The Mongolian government showed unity of purpose to the whole world, and we saw that things were going well. Japan, China, Korea, Russia, and America all agreed. I am happy that the government accepted our law and agreed to carry out our policy with few noisy quarrels. I must emphasize that the elderly and the people of Mongolia have nothing to worry about. When the Great Khural met, the weak points of the law were discussed, and the regulations were confirmed. Now, however, there are many quarrels and a lot of haggling, and things are pretty unpleasant. The Khural's members take bribes and are corrupt, and they drink and brawl inside the Khural building. This lack of discipline has spread and people are not happy. Things are not good now and everyone is silent.”

So we must pay attention to these minor mistakes. Today, however, there was the alarming news that within the past year two watchmen in one company were killed when people robbed a pawnshop. Two people involved were given the death penalty, and two others were sentenced to prison for 15 to 20 years. Generally, however, the law is too weak on robbery and murder. On the other hand, the rich gobble up the *negdels'* communal property, and the government remains silent when their names are mentioned in spite of the popular demand for government action.

Finally, a man named D. Dorligjav, an embezzler par excellence, along with several others, was involved in the collapse of the bank. People talk about these men by name but not about the regulations. This Dorligjav was involved in embezzlement along with more than ten other people and, though they were punished, we should have gone after their property.

Every one knows that our President P. Ochirbat built winter quarters for himself that cost sixty million *tugriks*. In addition, the Koreans gave him two cars for his personal use and a government jeep. Finally, in many of the old young pioneer holiday camps, two or three story summer buildings have been constructed for private individuals, and the government should be able to confiscate these. P. Ochirbat stated on the radio: “It is true that I used sixty million *tugriks* for the building, and I will return the money.” So, why should anyone talk about this? Don't talk, and protect his reputation. That is what all of this is about. However, people do not like this, and we keep on hoping that a four-year program will be worked out well. For example—there is a now a high school where children are fed for free and can complete their education.

In the past ten years, too little attention has been paid to enabling poor children in the countryside to attend school. It is frightening that during the last ten years, hundreds of children who should go to school do not know how to read and write. There are even good youths, 18 or 19 years old, who are

illiterate; young people between the ages of 10 and 20 do not know their letters; and many youngsters are illiterate when they join the military, which their leaders find distressing because these young recruits cannot master the new military techniques. In response to this situation, our Party and government have wisely set up a free school dormitory for school students. If the university is too demanding for some young people, they can attend the free technicums. However, there was an article in yesterday's newspaper about the children of a civil servant who studied free at a middle school, thereby taking the place of less privileged children. The Japanese helped repair, enlarge, and equip thirty school buildings and paid Japanese builders, engineers, and other professionals to furnish twenty schools in Ulaan Baatar. Some work was also done by the Indians and Chinese. We also need services for medical care including well equipped ambulances. Our government must also decide on many important global issues:

First: There are many territorial issues that must be decided. Mongolia has been divided into four zones or areas, so that people who live in the villages and in the countryside can be nearer to the markets for their consumer goods. For example, the Kharkhorin zone was established in the center of the *aimags* to be nearer to Ulaan Baatar for market access and for some work. A school, cultural institutions, a market, and trading facilities are concentrated here. So that was the decision to create these four zones.

Second: A very important issue in the lives of the Mongolian people is building the "Millennium Road." All the world supports this project, and everyone thinks it is the right thing to do. However, some in this democracy speak ill of this "Millennium Road" and of the government and Party support for this "Fantasy Road." But this is not a "Fantasy Road," and "Millennium Road" will prove it. There is a commitment to work on road repair and to restore the national industries, some of which are now even running. There were a ferrous metal factory and a sheepskin *deel* factory in Darkhan city, and both are now working again. The many herds in our country produce a lot of sheepskin, so a processing industry is very important to us. The first milk factory was a "kombinat" built at Erdenet Mountain, which did a great deal to help feed Mongolia. There had been a question of debt which was dropped—thank heaven.

5.7. The Plan for the *Negdel* Standard

IL: Could you speak about the kinds of plans presented to the *negdel* members and how the members hoped to fulfill them.

RM: Various measures were taken depending on the availability of water for the herds. For example, one milker was responsible for 15 cows while 10

milkers, who were family members, on the milk farm took care of 150 cows. The cowherd and workers caring for the first year calves were separate from the two people who were responsible for the cows and second year calves. The herds were well fed in the winter from the cut hay. The norm from one cow and one milker was on the average 550 liters of milk a year. One liter brought in 2.50 *tugriks* so in one year between 11 to 12 thousand *tugriks* was raised, which went to salaries for the *negdel* members. And with more milk, the salaries were higher. In addition, the cowherd and “calfherd” earned salaries for raising the young animals which was based on the number of cows.

On one *negdel* there were about fifteen farms, and three families had a herd of 500 sheep, which were subdivided by age and sex, with all the lambs placed together in a herd, and the 10 month old lambs, who had been weaned, were put together. The herders were given a salary depending on the number of animals, so a herder with 500 sheep received an annual salary of 10,000 *tugriks*. Various events could reduce or add to these wages. If, because of poor herding, many animals were killed and/or eaten by a wolf or a dog, the herders’ salaries were reduced, whereas herders who fattened up their animals were given higher salaries. If the plan was not fulfilled, salaries were reduced, and wages were cut if the herds perished. Deductions were settled before salaries were paid. Money could also be earned from building the *negdel khashaa* and mowing the grass.

The *negdel* did not pay for those involved in the first democratic production enterprises because salaries were based on labor day units. A work unit was worth 100 grams of meat a day and 200 grams of dairy food and vegetables a day, which could be exchanged for manufactured goods. Several years after the *negdel* movement began, the name of the “People’s Production *Negdel*” was changed to “Rural Economic *Negdel*” which, in the 1960s, calculated the output in labor-day units rather than in money. These were the two historic periods for the *negdels*.

IL: What sort of herds did you raise at your Ikh Tamir “Gerelt Zam” *negdel*?

RM: About 100 herds of horses, cows, sheep, and goats, with the organization of the herds based on the type of animal. There were 250 lambs in one herd, 500 female sheep in another, 100 horses in another, and 150 to 200 barren cows in still another. There were 100 families on the “Gerelt Zam” *negdel*.

IL: Were the herds always precisely organized?

RM: Yes—at first this was not the case. The private economy at the time allowed up to 100 sheep, and you had the sole authority to move pastures. Our interests were taken care of at that time. Everybody felt that they did not want to join up with other families and could watch those 100 sheep on the *negdel* themselves. Before the 1960s, people joined the *negdels* voluntarily. In the

1960s and 1970s, laws and regulations were drawn up which our “Ikh Tamir” refined.

Barren cows, which were calves in their third year without offspring, were generally not allowed near the milk farm. The males, on the other hand, were given to the co-op. Thus, it seems, the cows had the greatest effect on the herds. 250 to 300 cows formed a herd, which was watched over by two to three herders. About 20 people from two to four families took care of a herd. Since this number fluctuated, there were about 12 people in 3 families, though 20 people might be split into four families. So this was how the *negdel* was organized.

5.8. The *Negdel's* Economic Balance

For 2000 years Mongolia's herding economy was based on moving pastures. After the democratic revolution, private property was promoted although, in the 1930s, most activity took place on the collective farm, which was organized on a voluntary basis. However, the Party and the government believed that the herds and property of those who joined the *negdels* had to be redistributed or the collective would not grow and would be destroyed. People were attracted by this collective living in 1935-6 when the “People's Production *Negdels*” began to be organized. People came together and used many oxen and ox carts to build the “Jingiin *negdel*” and carry the skins and hides from their own private stocks to the co-op. The Jingiin *negdel* made an agreement with the co-op which entailed the transportation of the skins, hides, and furs by oxcarts to Altanbulag. Each cart carried a 200 kilogram load, and 80 carts handled 16,000 kilograms. Thus costs could be calculated from Jingiin *negdel* to Selenge Altanbulag. Bogd khüree, Altanbulag, and Tsagaan ereg were the three transmission points from which the raw materials from “Jingiin *negdel*” were sent on to the northern *aimags* of Arkhangai, Bulgan, Bayankhongor, as well as the central *aimag* of Bodg khüree, Selenge *aimag*, and Altanbulag. The skins and hides were exchanged for loads of grain.

Russian goods, cotton cloth, tea, and tobacco were ordered as part of an agreement by which the co-op could gain money. From 1927 to 1930 the Jingiin *negdel* was the official place for firewood.

IL: When did all this trade come to an end?

RM: During democratic times. From 2000-2001, there was very little trade.

IL: During the *negdel* period, trade was number one. Explain how it became number two!

RM: For trade to be first, there must be large State supported markets. I was a *negdel* leader, and a certain percentage of the herding economy was calculated by the Co-operative Trade and Procurement Unit. Thus the director and the

negdel leader who were concerned with these demands had to get along and be friendly. We could talk things over and, when necessary, I offered help. For example—"I have 700 cowhides, each worth 12 *tugriks*, to give you." Then a discussion would begin, and finally the leader gave over 700 cowhides from the second and third year calves that had been treated and trimmed. There were controls that kept the quality of goods high. If the products were of poor quality, the prices were reduced. In addition, the *negdel* sold some goods to the leader of the Co-operative Trade and Procurement Unit, and he begged a lot from the *negdel* leader who, in turn, also begged for a better price for his goods. The State and the Co-op organized this marketing process well, so we had no debts, and the money was always ready. When things were sold, they were paid for without an intermediary. The Mongols, from time immemorial, have followed the admirable custom of repaying their debts fairly quickly. For example, if I am in debt to Lkhagvasuren for 100 *tugriks*, I run and pay him quickly. Generally the Mongols repay their debts as soon as possible. In democratic times, I do not know if this is considered a good quality.

Our *negdel* was large with over 100,000 head of cattle. We were extremely disciplined, had no debt or payments due, and followed a strict routine. The *negdel* leader made sure that a veterinarian inspected the older animals in the herds in the fall, so they could be separated, and the rest of the herds could enter the New Year in good condition. The "remainder herd" was used for food and drink by the *negdel* leaders. Mr. L. Jagvaral, who was a member of the government bureaucracy, came to our *negdel* for two days to go fishing. A 20-30 word telegram had been sent to that effect. Jagvaral told me to give it to him, and he paid me for it. Today, however, people have millions of debts.

IL: Was commerce responsible for providing all the goods that were necessary in the lives of its members?

RM: Yes—from the school children's notebooks to the grain, tea, and tobacco. The leader was responsible if these things ran out, as well as for everything on the *negdel*. Now there is no Co-operative Trade and Procurement Unit because one can buy tea and tobacco at the market—such is business today. Now the State has united the co-operatives and the *negdels*, which makes things difficult for Mongolian families. There is no place to buy sheep's wool. On the other hand, families now have a hard time selling their wool, which has often been left out in the rain and has become trash. So now one kilogram of sheep's wool is worth more than 100 *tugriks*, but there is no place to buy it. A few Chinese have come, but there no one is responsible for providing the wool for the Mongolian rug industry. In the old days, sheep's wool was regulated by a plan which had to be fulfilled. There were 160,000 sheep from

the 100,000 herds on our *negdel*. One sheep usually gave 1 kilogram 200 grams of wool. In those days, to meet the requirements of the plan, I even saved a bunch of wool in my pockets, so as not to waste it. “Wool was gold” and “Fulfill the plan for wool!” were the demands forced on the workers.

Now, no one is responsible for the wool which is just lying around. Those in business prepare orders for wool, skins, and hides and transport them by car to the city and return with grain, tea and tobacco. The *negdel* leader and the Co-operative Trade and Procurement Unit have no relationship, and everything is done on one’s own. In the past, the grain for the *negdel* was always ready, but now it is passed through a business man who sells one kilogram of grain for over 240 *tugriks* at the market. At Ikh Tamir, it now costs 340 *tugriks*.

In the old days, the Co-operative Trade and Procurement Unit never changed its prices. Anyone who tried to raise prices was sent directly to prison. Each loaf of bread should weigh one kilogram, and the procurer checked to make sure it was not short 800 or even 200 grams. If so, the baker would be sent to prison. The law was very harsh, but now—how much does a loaf weigh? Almost 500 grams, but it doesn’t really matter. And the price keeps rising; it now costs 250 to 300 *tugriks*. The National Co-operative and Procurement Unit could pass on consumer goods from the cheap raw materials from the herds. In so doing, the State might lose a little, but the loss could be made up. Now small companies in the capital cannot get these raw materials from the herders since the herders do not come to Ulaan Baatar to sell them. Thus the connection between the herders and the markets has been broken.

There are so few raw materials available that there is no work in the State factories to manufacture the products from these goods. Previously, the Co-operative Trade and Procurement Unit had sold the skin and hides following the standards as outlined in the plan. But now there are no standards, and everything is up to the businessman. Now the “Castle Market” sells sheep’s wool for more than 5000 *tugriks*. In August, what is called the winter wool was sold from the skin of the sheep when the wool had grown back after the first shearing. This is very good wool indeed and can fetch 2000 *tugriks*. What remains, then, is a hairless hide, but the wool is very good and sells for 2000 *tugriks*. The Chinese traders, however, offer 5000 *tugriks*. This is the sort of trade we have instead of what existed under the Co-operative of Trade and Procurement.

5.9. Preparing Workers

RM: Many thanks. I don’t know if what I have talked about is useful.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Mongolia was a poor and weak country way behind many other nations of the world. By an order of I.V

Stalin, which we could not defy, the monasteries and the lamas were destroyed. With a great deal of work, the monasteries are now being restored for one million *tugriks* a year, which is good for both Mongolia and Asia. The Manchus made the Mongols into stupid animals, but the People's Revolution helped the Mongols advance and gain respect. For seventy years after the October Revolution, the Russians helped the Mongolians move forward and prosper. Mongolia became a member of the United Nations and known throughout the world, but democracy led to her decline. However, relations with China are friendly with fewer quarrels and more discussions, and the Chinese have built several buildings in our country. On the other hand, after seventy years of friendship, we have chased the Russians away. It is fair to say that our country is confused. We pity all those who are suffering in so many different ways. But things will be better because many countries are trying to help us. We are now rejuvenated, and the young are working.

For many years the People's Government has supported art, culture, various sports, and gymnastics. The *negdels* also promoted the key role culture, art, and sports played in the lives of its members. Like a flower that grows from the root and becomes green and then more beautiful, this cultural and athletic foundation is important in the lives of the people on the *negdels*. It will not, however, grow from poor roots. The Party, government, and the *negdels* all supported culture and art in the lives of the herders. The Party Great Khural, along with the *aimag* Party Committee, decided on the farm concerts and gymnastic competitions.

There were twenty *negdels* in Arkhangai. The Chuloot *sum negdel* was led by R. Dorjpalam who directed arts and culture in Arkhangai *aimag*. He asked the Party to meet with me, and he proposed the title of "Labor Hero" for arts and culture in the *negdels*. So we went to work and set up a "red corner" and organized a brigade, a settlement concert, and an anniversary festival, from which arose many famous singers and athletes. One such person is the fine singer Baldorj who sings in the cultural palace in Arkhangai *aimag*. He was a cultural leader-worker. Another good singer comes from our Bugat brigade. In addition our excellent middle school had its own building and was one of the best in the country. The *negdel* made sure it had supplies, and teachers worked hard at their lessons. S. Naimdorj, the school principal, was a painstaking, hard working man who was finally made a "Mongolian State Teacher of Merit." There were many such famous people on our *negdel* including four "State Great Herders."

D. Serdamba who was responsible for collecting semi-fine sheep's wool was one of them. He took care of hybrid sheep and their young, and his herds did not decrease. He separated the male lambs in the fall, and the third year

animals were delivered to the State. 500 male lambs were born in one year, each weighing 40 kilograms, and he delivered them to the State after May fifteenth. How did this man prevent his lambs from wasting away during the winter? The winter trees, which the snow had not hardened, were responsible. They remained soft with a lot of snow under them. Under the snow, the grass was green and easy to eat. Thus, this man's lambs retained their body fat that they had accumulated in the fall and generally did not become too thin. That is why most of the lambs weighed 40 kilograms, and D. Serdamba was awarded what amounted to more than one 100,000 *tugriks*. We welcomed D. Serdamba and gave him his prize. There were many other famous and good people who were excellent herders.

5.10. The Fast Horses of “Ikh Tamir”

Our *negdel* was famous for its race horses, and many were born at Ikh Tamir which is something to think about since there was only one race horse, and it was privately owned. The *negdel* only had plain old horses, and no members owned race horses. So it was said that the *negdel* should forget about raising race horses. A cowherd from the Bugat brigade on the farm of Ya. Lkhundevdavaagiin was a man called Kh. Chuluunpurev who lived rather poorly and was responsible for the standards of the horses, the cows, and the first year calves. Two or three horses were the norm for a cowherd, and Chuluunpurev took a third year horse which he came to love, and he talked about nothing but this horse which he was conditioning for racing. He won the race that was a first for a horse from “Gerelt Zam” *negdel*. We all praised him and his horse, and the next morning gave him the reward of a second year male horse. In his third year, this horse went on to win many first prizes—both in the *aimag* and in the *sum*. So Chuluunpurev won all these first prizes, and his horse was proclaimed the winning horse of “Gerelt Zam” *negdel*. This horse that he had trained was sold to a military post where it was tethered, and Chuluunpurev was sent to the military as well. Thanks to me, however, he had to serve only one year, not three. He wrote to us, from the military, and asked us only about the horse, not about his wife and children. He wanted to know if we were riding it and did the horse still belong to him. He returned from military service and worked well. People must join together in their work, but that doesn't always happen. Nevertheless it was said that our *negdel* finished first. If the owner of a horse conditions and encourages his steed, the horse can come in first. That's how our *negdel* produced a race horse.

There were many race horses, but the *negdel* and the leader did not do the training. The horses were generally trained for forty days away from home on the steppe. Many people became famous doing this training including two

students from my *negdel* high school who are now working for the government. Ch. Ganzorig was a minister in the Food Industry Ministry, and S. Khurelsukh was a leader in price measurement studies. Both had lived at Ikh Tamir for ten years. Several doctors also came from Ikh Tamir, including Kh. Tuyabayar, who had worked with the Germans, and the large intestines was his specialty. His father was the secretary of our *sum* Party cell, and his mother, N. Dolgor, was a mid-wife. So you can see that an excellent doctor trained in Germany came from Ikh Tamir.

The work was encouraging and, with this foundation, the youth worked well. The Herders' Cultural Palace was built to facilitate the arts and sports. At that time we did not have "electronic music" everywhere, but now we do. We had a gymnastics committee, and *negdel* competitions in which we competed successfully. My eldest son is from Burd *sum* and is now at Ikh Tamir and is our basketball sports master. He is now more than sixty years of age, which seems old to me. He also has a bad leg from playing basketball for so many years. One day I met with the teachers at Ikh Tamir who said: "Your old Grandpa is doing well! He is worse off than you are. He walks with the walker you gave him." This was the sports master. The team was considered famous, and it played abroad. In Beijing the team played badly and was repelled by the Chinese food and drink.

In addition, people threw things at the Mongolian team. Now that's my son—Old Grandpa.

5.11. My Children

YK: Could you talk about your children now?

RM: I have nine children, and the first child lives in Burd *sum*. One daughter and son live in Mörön *sum* where my daughter teaches at School 33 where I hear from many people that she is a good teacher. Recently her husband died, and she is suffering, and her life is very hard with many problems. Her husband had high blood pressure, and one sunny day he had a heart attack. I had nine children altogether, and now only three children live with me and six children are elsewhere. Besides the teacher, one child works in construction with Russia on SOT-3. The first child studied construction at the School of Technology in Ulaan Ude until his retirement. Another daughter is a kindergarten teacher. That is what the three daughters who live with me do. One son was born on the Mörön "Victory" *negdel* and lives in Hungary with his son. The next son is called Altangerel, and he is a very pugnacious man. If he comes across a fight, he joins right in. He lives with his wife and children in Dambadarjad district.

One grandchild is in the sixth class at a medical high school and is

thinking of becoming a doctor. He finished the Darkhan healing course in middle school and worked for five years with mothers and babies after completing a year at the medical high school. The next boy is a driver who can drive a YA3-469 car, and his firm plans to send him to work in Korea.

New rules and regulations about labor were drawn up. Our three daughters did not drink liquor but their husbands did. Interesting? When I was young, I drank a bit, so I am not innocent. It is not especially impressive that the young are scolded for drinking; a *negdel* leader would have been forced out for such behavior. I don't drink much, and drinking is not much discussed. People get drunk and sing and joke around. There is even a song about me, and I wonder if anyone in the Tamir country heard my song, which goes:

Passing the big stone
 With a glassy-eyed look
 Fat Minjuur
 And his two green eyes.

I had a good time when I was a famous *negdel* leader. That's why there is this song. All my life I was clever and fended off quarrels and noisy disputes. I worried about the poor and had the sort of personality that helped me make friends and make people laugh. Now I am old and still in good health. It doesn't matter what I eat and drink, and I eat a lot of marmot meat. I remember things now and think about going back to the countryside.

5.12. The Future Milk Farm

RM: I am now talking to a Japanese scholar who is writing a book publicizing the Mongolian rural State farm. I have talked about my rural life, the Gachuurt State Farm, and the mechanized farm. Now it is time to talk about the democratic movement. (And here RM is talking to a neighbor) How are you going to spend the summer?

What is going to happen to this mechanized State farm? Might it develop into something strange later on? If so, I wonder what that will be?

Neighbor: In socialist times, it was a good mechanized farm and provided milk for people in Ulaan Bataar. But with democracy came privatization. The farm sold our herds, and the area was finished and is now uninhabited. The owner lives in the city. So much for the farm. There are no such large farms today nor is there a good farming economy. Everything on the farm has been sold except for the ten, or at most fifteen to twenty, cows the farmer has kept. Now the old people in this area do not have this sort of work. People carried away three to five milk cows and sold them in the city. Maybe in the future one half, or at least a small majority, of all the farm co-ops will be better. This had been the general tendency. Our Gachuurt State Farm was built forty years ago and

was famous for the work it did. This book is a monument that is written very clearly.

YK: Are you from Gachuurt?

Neighbor: I actually am not from Gachuurt—I am a naturalist and live on a nature preserve, and I work as a state inspector and nature preserver. We must preserve nature in our lives. L. Gurbazariin was known as “the spirit of the place.” Gachuurt is a suburb of Bayanzurkh’s twentieth district. I was in charge of a group in the twentieth district of “Shar Khooloi Kheseeg.” However, people need to find a way to make a living.

YK: Do you have electricity now?

Neighbor: I have a generator and have organized a project using energy from the sun to power a federal communication line.

YK: Has the mechanized farm been privatized for several years?

Neighbor: It was privatized in 1995.

YK: In 1995 P. Jasrai was the leader of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party that organized the work of the government. How did people start taking things?

Neighbor: The leader was a man with four mechanized farms.

RM: Yes—it has happened that way. Your farm is now lost, and who has gained?

Neighbor: Yes, it is lost. The leadership organized the move to privatization which it thought was correct. However, a fair division and a just privatization done without errors did not happen. The situation was serious, and smart States should see the mistakes privatization can bring. There were wrong things done. The elderly were given nothing, and the best breed of animals was not given to them. So, each person was out for himself. There were few practical people involved in this privatization who had learned from life experience, like herding, and not from a book. I didn’t participate in this privatization. I came in 1995 but didn’t know how delicate privatization could be.

RM: How did you bring your business to life?

Neighbor: It is hard to do this. In fact, there are some things you cannot undo. The best facilities must be built again, and it is hard to find the money to construct a new building. The question is— can any one do this? It is hard to start all this up again.

RM: We will go and visit the farmer. One young person has organized a small chicken enterprise and is using an old building.

Neighbor: Little by little the buildings in the center have been privatized.

RM: Couldn’t those who have the courage use a building with support and money from the State? Wouldn’t this be a way for young people and those

with no work to now work for the country and support their families?

Neighbor: There are many things going on now having to do with work. The Chinese have invested in a joint chicken and egg enterprise and meat production enterprise. However, the chickens could die, which could destroy the margin of profit which would lead to an even worse situation. Many of our youth are at that point.

RM: Can you improve the farm yourself?

Neighbor: Someone could fix up the hay meadow and use the great number of containers stored there. However, there are difficulties with haymaking, and time is running out. Although the costs are high and the spending adds up, without doing this people have no work. There are few schools right here, and there is a small building for a lower school. Although there is an assistant doctor, there is no place for him. Families take care of families. There are four buildings, and there are eight families there. The cost of a building should be looked into and sometimes it is possible to take it over. There are many people in Gachuurt. The children are often undisciplined at home and land up in prison. Although we talked with the authorities about preventing this behavior, there was little change. The well used to provide work by giving water for cooking and for the herds but no more.

So it is up to the initiative of the young who could do fine hand carving on apartment buildings or making chairs needed in the countryside. Those in charge are aware that there is no support for such work for young people.

RM: It has been good to have this conversation—many thanks. And by the way, what is your name?

Neighbor: My name is Bazarsad. I have never met you before but I have heard of you.

Notes

- 1) A type of herder and agricultural co-operative that the Mongolian government initiated in the 1950s.
- 2) A province.
- 3) The Manchu Qing dynasty gained control over Eastern Mongolia in 1691 and Western Mongolia in 1697 and ruled until its collapse in 1911.
- 4) On the influence of his life as an orphan. Renchin Minjuur, *Töörogh zaya* (Ulaan Baatar: n.p.), n.d., pp. 36-38.
- 5) A mountainous and forested steppe region.
- 6) Harsh winters, often with considerable snow and frequently an ice covering over the land, preventing the animals from reaching the life-saving plants.
- 7) Fermented mare's milk.
- 8) On his attitude toward the land, see Minjuur, *Töörogh*, pp. 39-42 and 172-178.
- 9) A Mongolian-style tent.

- 10) The traditional leader of Mongolian Buddhism, also known, in Mongolian, as the Bogdo Gegen.
- 11) The Buddha of the Future.
- 12) A long robe, made of fur-lined sheepskin, with a sash.
- 13) A fenced-in enclosure for animals.
- 14) A pile of stones and other objects; they play an important role in shamanism.
- 15) A festival held in July that emphasizes archery, horse racing, and wrestling, among other activities.
- 16) Reindeer herders, numbering about 200 to 400 people who live in the northern Mongolian *aimag* of Khövsgöl.
- 17) A reliquary for deceased Buddhist monks.
- 18) Animal dung used to build fires for warmth in the *ger*.
- 19) Often referred to as the Lenin of Mongolia, Damdin Sükhbaatar (1893-1923) was one of the leaders of the Mongolian revolution that founded a socialist government in 1921. The central square in Ulaan Baatar is named in his honor, and his statue is also found in the Square.
- 20) A 1939 battle in which a combined Soviet and Mongolian force defeated the Japanese, preventing them from further encroachment on the Asian mainland.
- 21) Refers to the Cheka, the first secret police organization in the U.S.S.R. A Chekist, in common parlance, would refer to an individual who worked for or co-operated with a secret police force organization.
- 22) Monetary units, with 100 *mung* in a *tugrik*.
- 23) A group of Mongolians who lived in the U.S.S.R.
- 24) Legislative body or Parliament.
- 25) The present center of the city, with the Khural building, the Opera and Ballet Theater, and other prominent buildings.
- 26) Minjuur here is referring to the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, the only legal political party in that time.
- 27) Yumjagiin Tsendenbal (1916-1991) was Head of the Council of Ministers in the government and the First Secretary of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party from 1952 to 1984, the most important positions in the State.
- 28) An administrative subunit within the *sum*.
- 29) See Temujin Onon, *Through the Ocean Waves: The Autobiography of Bazaryn Shirendev* (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1997) for Shirendev's life and career.
- 30) The capital of the Buryat Soviet Socialist Republic.
- 31) Da. Ganbold (1957-) was appointed First Deputy Premier in October of 1990, after the first multi-party election in Mongolian history; R. Gonchigdorj (1954-) was elected Speaker of the Khural in 1996; E. Bat-Uul (1954-) was elected to the Khural in 1996.