

## BOOK REVIEWS

Rudolf P. Čuješ. *Slovenia, Land of Co-operators*. Willowdale, Ontario: Research Centre for Slovenian Culture, 1985. 66 pp. + appendices [= Slovenian Research Centre, Publications no. 37].

Slovenes have historically demonstrated strong political and social resilience in the face of adverse circumstances. Modern Slovenia is the most economically developed and innovative of the Yugoslav republics. It is no surprise, therefore, that Slovenia should have a rich cooperative tradition. Only the extent of this tradition, relative to the size of the nation, and its continuity through time and political change will surprise the reader of this book.

Slovenes were but one of the many subjugated national groups in the pre-World War I German-ruled Austrian state. Although Germans were a numerical minority they controlled the state, mostly through control of the economy. There was little chance that a Slovene, a Czech, a Slovak or a member of any of the other dominated ethnic groups could secure a business loan at a reasonable rate of interest, even though most members (60%) of these minorities were independently 'employed' as peasants, and many others were craftsmen. It was natural that members of these groups should seek to pool their capital in an organization which they could control. The most straightforward type of organization that served this purpose was the credit union. In addition, certain consumption goals could be furthered, and a bit of economic power could be wrested from the Germans, through ethnically-based consumer cooperatives.

The first recorded credit union in Austria was formed by Slovenes in 1851, while the first two consumer cooperatives were formed in 1852. By 1914 there were 12,240 credit unions in Austria—and, as testimony to their political economic function, more than 65% were non-German. According to Čuješ, "the largest saturation of Slovene cooperatives was in the crown-lands where Slovenes were in the minority."

Most of the increase in credit unions and consumer cooperatives was the result of political movements for the economic independence of the minorities. (It was beyond hope to agitate for political independence). Among Slovenes, the cooperative movement was started by a lawyer named Dr. Jože Vošnjak. However, growth was slow (only 61 Slovene credit cooperatives were in existence in 1892) for two principal reasons: firstly, Vošnjak's model of a cooperative was geared primarily toward urban use, and secondly, the principal social organization of the Slovenes, the Catholic Church, was not involved in the movement until the 1890s. However, with the awakening of ideological Catholicism and the introduction of a type of cooperative that was oriented to farming communities, growth was explosive. Led by a dynamic young priest, Dr. Janez Evangelist Krek, 481 new Slovene cooperatives were registered in Austria by 1905.

Čuješ' book documents this early history of Slovene cooperation and continues the history up to and including the situation under Yugoslav socialism. However, the book is as much a political, social and philosophical work as an historical account. Fourteen of the 65 pages of the main text are devoted to a discussion of the ideas of France Veber, the leading Slovene social philosopher. Veber argued that cooperation was the best social and economic order, not only for Slovenes or for subjugated or developing

nations, but for all peoples and for all times. Veber may have been the philosophical forerunner of Edvard Kardelj, the social theorist of Yugoslav socialism, inasmuch as he was among the first thinkers to propose an economic order that was neither based on the individual (capitalism) nor on the state (socialism), but rather on self-defined groupings in society. Veber stressed that these groupings would naturally, and should, have both economic and social functions, as Čuješ documents was the case for many of the credit unions.

The book is brief and highly readable. One cannot expect a complete account of the implications of historical developments in such a brief work. However, there are several issues which are discussed in an unsettling manner, or which seem to have been avoided. The principal one of these, in my view, relates to worker cooperatives: i.e., cooperatives based on ownership by those who work in them as opposed to those who consume their services. While the Rochdale pioneers, founders of the cooperative movement in England, were originally interested in consumer cooperatives, many thousands of worker cooperatives have been founded in the West based on the principle of one-person-one-vote. Moreover, Slovenia now finds itself to be an integral republic of a country whose economy is based on the concept of labor management. It is curious that in the book there is no mention of Krek's, the church's or other involved persons' attitudes toward worker management.

Also, from a purely analytical point of view, one wonders what might have accounted for the obvious imperfections in Austrian capital markets in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, which would have led to the necessity for such a boot-strap approach to finance. It is clear why the Slovenes were interested in establishing credit unions: they could not obtain adequate financing. The question that I have in mind is: why was it not to the advantage of at least some German banks to loan to Slovenes?

In spite of these questions, this book adopts a sound and scholarly approach to its subject matter, and is worthwhile reading for students of Slavic history and of the history of cooperation.

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Aleksandra L. Ceferin, *Slovensko slovstvo-Berilo: Slovenian Literary Reader*. Melbourne: Slovenian Library "Baraga House," 1984. 242 pp.

With the dearth of pedagogical materials available for the study of Slovene language and literature, it is a particular pleasure to have this new reader by Ms. Ceferin. Her anthology is one of the very few works to which the student of the Slovene language can turn once he or she has mastered the essentials of Slovene grammar and has acquired a basic working vocabulary of the language. Its breadth of coverage is outstanding, and the selections have been chosen carefully.

The author approached her work with excellent credentials, the most important of which is an extensive career in the field of foreign language teaching. Ms. Ceferin was born in Slovenia and settled in Australia in 1950. Her teaching experience was initially in the fields of German and Comparative Literature, and she currently teaches English at the secondary level. She has been active in promoting the study of Slovene in Australia and in establishing professional organizations in that country for the