

### **BOOK REVIEWS**

Matija Kovačič, *Sozialistische Landwirtschaftliche Kooperation in Slowenien*. [= Osteuropa Studien der Hochschulen des Landes Hessen, Reihe I. Giessener Abhandlungen zur Agrar- und Wirtschaftsforschung des europäischen Ostens]. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1980.

Rajko Ocepek, ed., *Slovensko kmetijsko združništvo*. Ljubljana: Zadružna Zveza Slovenije, 1983.

Two recent publications are devoted to agrarian co-operatives in Slovenia. The first is the product of scientific research by Matija Kovačič at the Agrarski Inštitut in Ljubljana and at the Fachbereich Landwirtschaft und Gartenbau der Technischen Universität München. The second is a luxurious edition from the Co-operative Union of Slovenia, on the occasion of two important anniversaries.

Kovačič describes activities of co-operative organizations in Slovenia as part of socialist co-operation, which he defines as “an economic and social process which is aimed at introducing socialist socio-economic relations into private agriculture in accord with the legal agrarian policy” (11). In his introduction he briefly describes the socio-economic order in Yugoslavia and the agrarian structure in Slovenia. He also gives a brief history of co-operatives and of agrarian policy in Slovenia through 1970.

His research attempts to answer two questions: a) to what degree did the practice of Slovene co-operatives realize the goals and principles of socialist co-operation in the period 1971-76? and b) what are the peculiarities of Slovene co-operative organizations, as compared with West German co-operative theory?

The goals of socialist co-operation are given as follows: a) the socialization of the agrarian process, not by the liquidation of private land property, but by uniting the labor and the means of production of private farmers through associated labor within the socialist economy; b) the modernization of and increase in productivity of private agrarian production, and c) improvements in the economic and social position of farmers (29).

The results of the study are as follows: a) of three forms of co-operation—the purchase of farm products from farmers; contractual production; and common production—only the last-named (a form which is not widely used) shows a significant increase in socialization; b) modernization of and increase in productivity has been achieved primarily among specialized farmers; and c) the increase in productivity was not large enough to bring farmers' income and social security up to the level of other sectors of society.

The results of a poll of farmers (1204 valid questionnaires from a total of 1240 distributed) indicate organizational weakness regarding the acquisition of agrarian products, as well as the procurement of input, the observance of terms of payment and contracts, market security, and the opportunity of determining product quality. Farmers are critical of the work of advisory and promotional services. Due to low earnings in agriculture, the legal principles of income distribution can be put into practice only in cases of common production.

In comparison with West German co-operatives there are some similarities, but there are also differences due to the different socio-economic systems. Thus, where West Germany has specialized co-operatives, based on membership, Slovenia has multi-purpose co-operatives, based on contracts with individual farmers (note that not all co-operants are members); where in West Germany the capital is based on members' shares, in Slovenia only a few co-operatives still issue shares (with a symbolic function only); and whereas in West Germany the surplus is divided among members according to the level of their

business with the co-operative, in Slovenia the surplus (if any) is used for common purposes. The greatest difference between the two systems, as seen by Kovačič, is in their objectives. West German agrarian co-operatives attempt to strengthen the private economy of their members; the Slovene socialist co-operatives, on the other hand, represent a form of employment of social means of production in the private production sector. The rationalization of private production processes should, in the long run, lead to an improvement of the farmers' socio-economic position.

Some agrarian co-operatives in West Germany have started to use contracting. From this fact Kovačič concludes that "it seems that the classical model of co-operatives is no longer capable of carrying out its mission in a developed economy; it must be adjusted to the new conditions," (105).

Kovačič's work is a valuable contribution to the literature on co-operatives in the communist socio-economic system. He gives a good survey of the many changes imposed on co-operatives in Slovenia since 1945—the abolition of co-operative property in 1954, which placed employees on the same level as co-operants; the devaluation of membership; basing participation on a contract with the co-operative by the individual farmer; the fact that co-operants need not be members of the co-operative; and so on. According to Kovačič, after the economic reform of 1965 "the general agrarian co-operative lost more and more of its co-operative characteristics and became a socialist enterprise" (21). His study also contains a substantial amount of statistical data (some of it based on 14 case studies) on the structure and activities of agrarian co-operatives as well as data about the savings and loan activities, which are at present the most important of the activities that are regulated as separate units (with their own accounting) inside the co-operative organization.

Kovačič openly states—something that many in the West seem unable to understand—that the Slovene co-operative organization is no longer a classical type of co-operative; here he also quotes Kardelj. Unfortunately, it is impossible to follow his logic when he states that "it is possible to see also socialist co-operation as a specific provision inside the general concept of co-operation" (22), given the Western understanding, which limits co-operatives to economics. He does not seem to differentiate between co-operation as one of the social processes that operate on all dimensions of human activity, and co-operatives, i.e., co-operative social processes in economics, with the additional specification of the identity of owners and users. In English the difference has to be specified, because the word *co-operation* is used for both the social process and the economic organization, but in Slovene and German different words are available: *Zusammenarbeit/sodelovanje* and *Genossenschaft/zadruga*. Kovačič also does not hide the fact that "from the beginnings socialist co-operation was understood as a model of the socialist transformation of private agriculture which, through socialization of the production process, should also contribute to an increase in production and productivity" (22). While private land property is legally recognized, it plays a progressively smaller role as a factor in production (32). Part of professional education through co-operatives is of a public nature. "Slovene co-operative organizations are therefore also an instrument of public agrarian policy. Their activities are partly financed by public funds" (50). Managers were replaced by hired directors, who can not be members of co-operatives. Supervisory councils in co-operatives are elected from a list of co-operants and employees, who are proposed by the political organizations in the co-operative (66). Regarding influence, "it has to be stated that co-operants have no direct influence on business in co-operative organizations" (70). "Management—which is part of the workers' collective—is thus, practically speaking, the most important center of deci-

sions in a co-operative organization. The legal competence of self-management organs—namely members—has thus in most cases importance only as authentication” (74). As the author indicates, many of the problems of agrarian co-operatives are part of the general problematic position of agriculture in a socialist economy. An additional terminological difficulty is that in many places Kovačič uses the term *social* when he means *socialist* or *socialized*. The study has summaries in both German and English.

Rajko Ocepek's book (with a difference in title between the cover, *Kmetijsko združništvo na Slovenskem*, and the frontispiece, *Slovensko kmetijsko združništvo*) was published by the Co-operative Union of Slovenia, on the centenary of the first Co-operative Union in Slovenia (1883) and the decennial of the re-foundation of the Co-operative Union of Slovenia (1972). Excluded from this study is any political evaluation of co-operative activities in Slovenia, or of their relation to co-operatives elsewhere in Yugoslavia, in the hope that this will be covered in a future publication. The first part of the book gives a short history of co-operatives in Slovenia, both in a general overview and in three sections: a) before World War II; b) socialist and self-management co-operatives; c) agrarian co-operatives after 1972. In the second part of the book some constituent organizations are described in greater detail. Between the two parts there is a list of Presidents of the Co-operative Union (1944-1982) and of other officers (1972-1982).

As is natural in such an official publication, it is much less critical than the study by Kovačič. In its history it does mention Janez E. Krek, but does not mention his successor Anton Korošec (who was also President of the Co-operative Union of Yugoslavia, and who lectured on co-operation at Belgrade University). Somehow, Gide's Christian name was changed from Charles to Georges. Surprisingly, too, there is no mention of the Rochdale pioneers in connection with co-operative principles adopted by the I.C.A.; also, on the table (18) of co-operatives in 1918, the first column does not add up to the number given, i.e., 730. Nevertheless, the usefulness of this richly-illustrated publication is much enhanced by extensive statistical data and maps. There are summaries in Slovene and in English.

Rudolf Čuješ, St. Francis Xavier University

James C. Davis, *Rise from Want. A Peasant Family in the Machine Age*. Philadelphia: U Philadelphia P, 1986. 165 pp.

Increasingly, historians are interesting themselves in the essentially unwritten histories of the largest section of humankind since the Neolithic—the peasantries, who have made it possible for the conventional historical heroes, members of the élites, to play out their roles. Thus intellectuals, artists and other professionals, priests, military leaders and rulers of fiefs, city states or nations all were freed by peasant labor to carry out their ways of life. Relying on oral histories related by elders and traditional story tellers, and on inferences from village, church and government documents, scholars of various disciplines are beginning to bring to our attention narratives where peasants are the protagonists. No longer are we to be limited to acquaintance with these peoples through impersonal statistical norms and information related from the point of view of ruling classes or foreign travelers. Nor need we rely on information gained from oral art, from myths, epic tales and stories. Important as these sources are, empirical data are also needed. The fieldwork