

Book Review

Lithuanian Agriculture Under the Soviet Regime

Pranas Zundė: DIE LANDWIRT-SCHAFT SOWJETLITAUENS,* Publ. by Johann Gottfried Herder Institute Marburg (Lahn), Behringweg 7, W. Germany, 1962, 155 pp.

The name of "Sowjetlitauen" (Soviet Lithuania) in the title of the book is the adaptation of the official terminology used by the Soviets. This name implies a certain legal status which is not recognized by free Lithuanians and by several governments of the Western world, including the government of the United States of America; consequently, it would be appropriate to avoid the use of the name of "Soviet Lithuania" and to substitute it by some other term (e.g. Lithuania under the Soviet regime) reflecting the true legal status of the occupied country.

In 1940, after the annexation of Lithuania by the Soviets, basic changes were made in nearly all walks of life. One of the most drastic changes was the collectivization of agriculture.

It is a known fact that the communistic program calls for the abolition of private ownership of all production means and for central planning of national economy. This program, applied to agriculture, leads to its collectivization in the form of kolkhozi (collective farms theoretical-ly owned and managed by the participating farmers) and sov-khozi (farms operated by the state).

Collective farms place the farmers in a very artificial environment, entirely different from the one in which they are accustomed to living in the twentieth century. The pattern of collectivized agriculture was created in Soviet Russia, but the methods used to achieve the collectivization were so terrifying, and the losses so enormous, that the farmers of other countries were very resentful to the new type of land tenure system. In spite of this unfavorable disposition, the communistic approach to the organization of agriculture in a country dominated or occupied by the Soviets did not change in the slightest. Collective farming is the only acceptable form of land tenure system under the Soviet regime. As long as this form cannot be achieved by free consent, it has to be instituted by the means of the four magic "T's" — tricks, treats, threats, and terror. Lithuanian peasants bitterly experienced on their own flesh the enforced application of the "4-T" program.

In 1940, when the country was occupied by the Soviets, the occupants' solemnly declared that peasants would have the full right to choose their own form of farming. The farmers were promised freedom to continue their farming on an individual basis, if they preferred to do so. Anyone daring to advocate a compulsory collective farming system was labeled an enemy of the people. After a short time it became evident that all of this talk was merely a trick to conceal the real aims during the initial period of occupation.

In 1941 the Soviets started to organize their first kolkhozi in Lithuania. At that point they treated newly-formed kolkhozi very generously and granted them many special privileges. At the same time, they started to use oppressive means against the owners of private farms.

The German occupation of the country (1941-1944) and the economic disorder after the second World War delayed the organization of kolkhozi until 1948, but from that year until 1951 all efforts were thrown into discarding the old land tenure system and into the launching of the new form of collective farming. As a result of the continual threatening and terrorizing of the farmers, collectivization of Lithuanian agriculture had nearly reached completion by the close of 1951.

Pranas Zundė, a talented and zealous engineering student, was forced to leave Lithuania in 1944. For some time he lived in Germany, where he completed his professional studies. During this time he became interested in the current living

conditions of his native country. He devoted his special attention to the field of agriculture, where the biggest change was being made by the Soviets. From various standpoints it is interesting to picture how this process of basic change was accomplished, what results were achieved, and how they compare with previous performance. We are able to find the answers to these questions in Zundé's monograph about the agriculture in Lithuania under the Soviet regime. The monograph was written in German and published by the Institute of Johann Gottfried Herder in a series of scientific contributions to the history and regional knowledge of East and Central Europe. Zundé's work covers the period of 1944 through 1959. It was in 1959 that the Soviets started their new seven-year plan; consequently, the period covered by Zundé's monograph practically coincides with the official dividing line drawn by the Soviets with respect to their economic plans and goals.

A student of Soviet national economy is confronted with many difficulties in securing reliable statistical material and in gaining access to impartial bibliographical sources. Soviet institutions and authors work under rigorous party control and facts not favorable for communistic doctrines or propaganda are not disclosed. Furthermore, the analysis and interpretation of the facts in Soviet literature very often are biased, interwoven with great hatred to the non-communistic system, and diluted with wishful thinking about their own system. Therefore, anyone using such literature should always be alert and critical; otherwise, a person preoccupied with the study of Soviet economy, may be precariously trapped. Zundé avoided this type of danger. He extensively used Soviet sources in their original languages (Lithuanian, Russian, etc.), critically evaluated the findings, extracted the most significant material related to his theme, made his own computations where official data was unobtainable, and presented them in his monograph. The following is a list of the ten chapters in Zundé's monograph:

1. Introduction
2. The Change of Land Tenure System and the Collectivization of Agriculture
3. Mechanization of Agriculture
4. Land Utilization and Crop Areas
5. Crop Yields
6. Livestock Industry
7. Agricultural Processing Industry No. 1, 1963 31
8. Planning in Agriculture and the Possibilities for the Increase of Agricultural Output
9. The Economic Situation of the Farmers in Kolkhozi and the Workers in Sovkhozi
10. Profit Question in Kolkhozi and Sovkhozi.

The text in Zundé's treatise comprises 80 pages; in addition to that, there are seventeen pages of bibliography and fifty-eight pages are devoted to notes and statistical tables. Until 1956, official information and statistical data about agriculture under the Soviets was very scarce, but since that time the curtain has been raised to some extent and partial information has been released.

In order to penetrate deeper than official Soviet sources would allow, the author extensively used hints and information scattered in various Soviet newspapers, periodicals, and even included monitored radio dispatches. Based on this additional information, Zundé aptly reconstructed omitted links in official publications. It is obvious that such an approach entails certain risks with respect to the correctness of reconstructed data, but there is no better method for a Western author attempting to reveal what is going on behind the artificial screen.

A good example of the reconstruction work that has been accomplished by the author can be found in Chapter 9 of his monograph, dealing with the earnings of peasants in kolkhozi. Official Soviet publications did not reveal this type of information. Zundé, using official data scattered in various places and supplementing it by the information from other Soviet sources, arrived at the following figures:

The average annual earnings of a Lithuanian peasant in the kolkhoz in 1958 were 684 old rubles (conversion rate of an old ruble to a new one is 10 to 1) and 452 kilograms of grain. The value of grain at the State established buying price was 360 old rubles. In 1955 the earnings were about two and one-half times lower than in 1958.

The above earnings were so meager and poor by any comparative standard, that even the hottest Soviet propagandist wouldn't dare quote them, let alone boast about them!

The author, comparing the earnings received by the farmers in kolkhozi with the labor and other income earned by the same farmers in 1938-1939, when the farming was on a private basis, found the percentage of the gross product in the first case to be only 19 and in the second case, 73. To make the difference even more explicit, it could be stated that before the second World War a hired farmhand (usually a family head of a married couple) on estates and larger farms received about 1500 to 2000 kilograms of grain per year, which is approximately four times greater than the quantity of grain received by a farmer in the kolkhoz in 1958.

Taking into consideration the purchasing power of the currency (litas) of independent Lithuania and of the Soviet ruble, cash and other types of payments for hired farmhands were on the average no smaller than the payments received by the farmers in kolkhozi. This simple comparison shows that a hired farmhand did much better under the private enterprise system than a farmer is now doing under the collectivized system. Bringing the living standard of a former independent

farmer below the standard of his former laborer is a curious and hardly believable phenomenon, but that is precisely what has happened in collectivized Lithuanian agriculture.

The low earnings under the new system prevailed in spite of the fact that mechanization of agriculture was artificially stimulated (Chapter 3 of Zundé's monograph) and several thousand of the so-called agricultural specialists, plus other bureaucrats, were put on the payroll of kolkhozi.

In his work, Zundé tries to establish how much the government collected from the private plots of land owned by the farmers (pp 72-73). This collection was in the form of taxes and fixed purchase prices, which were well below the market prices for compulsory deliveries of products.

His figures, for all kolkhozi in 1955, are as follows:

The payments in cash and the value of the grain received by the farmers amounted to 166 million rubles; on the other hand, the government collected from the farmers 270 million rubles.

This indicates that in 1955 the farmers in kolkhozi worked not only for nothing, but the government still found the means to appropriate a sizeable part of their gross product received from the small private plots (plot size is approximately 1-1% acres). Collectivized agriculture has its own methods and yardsticks — what is inconceivable under the system of private farming, is perfectly feasible under collectivized agriculture.

Up to the present time, not the payments in cash, nor in kind, but the small, private plot constituted the backbone of a farmer's income on a kolkhoz.

Grim is the reality, but rosy are the plans on paper which were prepared by Soviet officials. At the moment of this writing, it is already clear that the current seven-year plan for collectivized Lithuanian agriculture is lagging behind expectations. In this respect, the year of 1932 was grave. The planners omitted from their projections the unfavorable weather conditions which prevailed that year, a general apathy of the farmers in kolkhozi, bureaucratic management, and basic deficiencies in the entire organizational structure of collectivized agriculture.

The collectivization of agriculture is considered by the Soviets as a "wonder drug" which should create universal prosperity and abundance. Up to this point, these expectations have not materialized in any way.

As far as Lithuanian agriculture is concerned, its collectivization was a "wonder drug" of a thalidomide type. It gave temporary satisfaction and created illusions for the party workers and bureaucrats. At the same time, it caused a massive exploitation and a misery for the hard-working population in kolkhozi, giving birth to a severely distorted type of contemporary Lithuanian agriculture.

Zundé's concise monograph, covering only selected aspects of Lithuanian agriculture for the period immediately following the collectivization, is a valuable contribution to a confused area. The author cannot be blamed for the fact that his conclusions, based on information derived from original Soviet sources relating to collectivized agriculture, are different from the views expressed by the communist party and by Soviet institutions.

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