

## Book Reviews

*The New Hungarian Agriculture*. By Lewis A Fischer and Philip E. Uren. Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973. 168 pp. \$10.00.

The *New Hungarian Agriculture* is a descriptive rather than an analytical work. The book follows the structural development of Hungarian agriculture and countryside since 1945, with some glances back to the prewar years.

The 120 pages are divided into seven chapters. The readers are reminded in several instances of periods in Hungarian history when foreign influences dominated the land. This was "not all bad," in the authors' view. The inequities of prewar land distribution and the redistribution of land in 1945 are well documented. "The great land reform" created too small units, and donated the land to many individuals ill-equipped with finances and often lacking the knowledge of how to cultivate and manage a farm. The inevitable failure to private farming ended in collectivization which had a short setback following Stalin's death but came to a conclusion in the 1960's when authorities applied "greater skill" to achieve their goal.

The authors selected 3 collective farms in Somogy county to illustrate the great varieties in stage and type of farming even in close vicinity. These differences are hidden in aggregate national statistics.

The authors explain the New Economic Mechanism which has been in effect since 1968. This mechanism is a deviation from the Communist economic theory. It involves limited use of market economy and reintroduces the profit motive. Under this mechanism, auxiliary industrial activities have been permitted in collectives and the continuation of household farming has been assured and even supported.

Industrial development in absorbing farm workers gradually relieved the agricultural sector from overemployment; however, because many of the younger people left the farms, this exodus led to the ageing of farm population. At present, a gradual amalgamation of neighboring collectives is in process. This consolidation of farming may help prove a new type of village development, a center with

about 5,000 population serving as nucleus to the smaller settlements. These villages will have hospitals, and educational and cultural facilities.

The principal merit of the book lies in its good organization. The authors bring under one roof the materials available on economic, topographical, and rural development and they point out the interdependence of various factors, including political, which are shaping rural life in Hungary.

This reviewer considers a shortcoming the book's numerous citations, footnotes, and tables which are of little value to the lay reader. If the authors are writing for the serious student of social and economic aspects of socialized agriculture, the presented data are inadequate. To this reviewer's disappointment, the author's field trips to Hungary revealed no more information than what has been available in the literature. The authors sounded out only county officials, writers and leaders of the present regime, and retold the official version. It remains obscure what one of the authors gained in discussing the "black Christmas in 1944 and the days of Hunyadi," with young farm managers who were in 1944 at grade school age.

The authors' thesis in connecting the "great land reform" with the previous inequalities in land distribution and relating the collectivization with the failure of productivity on the newly created units is erroneous. The land reform was an intermediary step designed to justify collectivization by its anticipated failures. The land reform was conducted in a disruptive manner—not for correcting past inequalities but for destroying the so-called class enemies. A few statements in the book, with little validity, could have been avoided like "the Westerners were unreasonable to regard Stalin's iron rule total and permanent." This reviewer has not met a "Westerner" yet, who did not expect some change for the better after Stalin's death. The authors' statement in Chapter IV that, "collectivization is sine qua non of any socialist system," raises a question about their familiarity of the agricultural organizations in Sweden, Finland, Yugoslavia, or Poland. Nevertheless, the book's merits outweigh the few shortcomings, one of which is the lack of providing insight into the daily life of farm workers and collective members. The book mainly concerns itself with the framework surrounding the farmers, not with the farmers themselves. The book has not made clear to me whether everybody engaged in farming or just a minority is standing at the threshold of the "brave new world" the authors see coming.

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