

PEASANTS AND POWER

State Autonomy
and the
Collectivization of Agriculture
in Eastern Europe

JOAN SOKOLOVSKY

Westview Special Studies on
the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

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To Rebecca

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Joan Sokolovsky

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1

Collectivization and Theory-Building

In the wake of the reform movements sweeping the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the international community has become absorbed by the dramatic events taking place in the area. Whether the focus is on the consolidation of Solidarity as a political force in Poland or the reorganization of political parties in Hungary, attention has centered on economic and political changes emanating from the urban centers of the region. Although it is often noted that economic crisis has fostered political change, there has been relatively little interest in the agricultural sector of both countries despite their key role in relation to overall economic production within these nations. This lack of attention to rural matters mirrors overall developmental policy in Eastern Europe where the demands of heavy industry have always been given ideological and economic priority. Yet agricultural policy-makers in Hungary have been experimenting for over twenty years with the kind of market-based reforms that are only now being discussed in an urban context and private enterprise has never lost its dominance in the Polish countryside.

This work is concerned with the development of these agricultural policies out of the crisis that shook Eastern Europe following the death of Stalin in 1953. Utilizing theoretical insights gained from a study of social change in the Third World, it seeks to unravel the dynamics behind the initiation and implementation of a collectivization policy in Poland and Hungary and to analyze the structure of forces in each nation that led to the creation of agricultural sectors unique to the region. The central question is to determine why agriculture in Poland was left essentially in private hands after 1956 while enormous resources were devoted to the nearly complete socialization of agriculture in Hungary in little more than two years. While I focus on events occurring between 1948 and 1960, this work is written with the underlying assumption that the resolution of a crisis in one era creates structures that both limit and facilitate options that can be taken in response to future conditions.

Although agricultural policy in both countries has gone through many twists and turns since 1960, one continuing irony has been the ability of Hungarian agricultural producers to take advantage of economic incentives provided by the government through a collective structure while Polish peasants

have been generally constrained by the state's monopoly over inputs and marketing. I argue that this situation followed logically from the relative position of the peasantry vis à vis the central state after the upheavals of 1956. Thus understanding the dynamics of collectivization and decollectivization as they occurred in the 1950s provides a unique perspective on the course of events in contemporary Eastern Europe.

Collectivization: Peasants and the State in Eastern Europe

Following World War II and the establishment of the People's Democracies, the largely agrarian states of Eastern Europe experienced rapid industrialization, urbanization and the restructuring of class relations. In the course of these transformations, rural social structure was affected by successive state policies of land reform and the collectivization of agriculture. By 1962, socialization of agriculture under state control was nearly completed in all the countries of Eastern Europe except Poland and Yugoslavia. In a period when the peasantries of the Third World were pressing their claims to international attention through wars of national liberation and social revolution, little has been heard from the rural population of Eastern Europe. Further, there has been scant systematic analysis of the transformation of the rural landscape in the region from the perspective of theories of social change.

Focusing on Hungary and Poland, with additional reference to events in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia, my aim is to place the processes of agricultural change in Eastern Europe in the general context of state-peasant confrontations in the modern world. Beginning with three rationales for collectivization policies derived from studies of the collectivization of Russian agriculture in the 1930s, analysis will center on the variation in results of the collectivization drives in the two countries.

The countries of Eastern Europe provide an excellent arena for the application of comparative methods to the study of historical phenomena. In each case, the Communist Party consolidated state power in the years following World War II. Except for the case of Yugoslavia, the autonomy of state policymakers was limited by their dependence on Soviet power to maintain their regimes. With the notable exception of Czechoslovakia, peasant majorities existed in each of the states. Finally each embarked upon a program of collectivization of agriculture following a model of development arising out of the earlier experiences of the Soviet Union. The advancement of heavy industry was given priority over the needs of the agricultural sector of the economy.

Broadly speaking, the implementation of policy occurred within a similar time sequence: postwar land reform; initial collectivization drive begun in the period 1948-49; a period of retreat following Stalin's death in 1953 and the introduction of the Soviet New Course under Malenkov; a brief resumption in

1955 as Khrushchev gained ascendancy (temporarily disrupted by events in Hungary and Poland in 1956); followed by a less coercive but more effective final push in the late fifties that resulted in the general collectivization of agriculture by 1962 in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Hungary. The most obvious variations from the pattern took place in Bulgaria where collectivization was pushed most forcefully and completed most quickly and Poland and Yugoslavia where a second drive was never really implemented.

Analysis centers specifically on Poland and Hungary because these two nations faced a similar crisis in 1956 which left the issue of the eventual collectivization of agriculture very much in doubt. In Poland, the movement was never revived while in Hungary it was fully accomplished only five years later. The reasons behind this disparity and its actual effects upon the rural sectors in each country will be scrutinized.

Collectivization and Types of Collectives

The blueprint for the transformation of agrarian structure that occurred in Eastern Europe following the creation of the People's Democracies was based upon earlier Soviet experience in changing a production system based upon individual peasant households into a network of large scale agricultural enterprises subject to central planning and control. Collectivization is the overall term used to describe the process of achieving the socialization of agriculture.

The Soviet model of agricultural organization emerged as a result of contradictory pressures upon Communist Party economic planners. For a combination of economic, political and ideological reasons, policymakers decided to eliminate private property in agriculture and create large scale production units under state control. At the same time, concentration of national resources in a massive industrialization drive made it impossible for the state to supply sufficient machinery and equipment to establish a system of industrial farming that had been considered a prerequisite of collectivization in Marxist theory. The result was the institution of four types of production units that have been reproduced in the Eastern European context.

The state farm (Soviet *Sovkhoz*) is an agricultural enterprise owned by the state on which farmers work as wage laborers. This type of production unit is seen as the highest form of collective and often gets a disproportionate share of agricultural investment.

The collective farm (Soviet *Kolkhoz*) is a transitional form between the state farm and individual peasant plots. In theory owned by its members, the collective is composed of a large area cultivated in common and small private plots controlled by the separate households. Aside from access to the private plots, members are paid according to the type and amount of their work, depending upon the profits of the enterprise. The collective became the dominant form of agricultural unit in the Soviet Union as well as for most of the countries

of Eastern Europe. The size of private plots on the collectives has varied according to country but they tend to produce a significant portion of the nation's agricultural surplus.

Machine-Tractor Stations (MTS) are not really production units but concentrations of agricultural machinery which are hired by the rural enterprises for specific tasks. In the initial collectivization phase, workers on Machine-Tractor Stations have often been responsible for political monitoring of neighboring collectives.

Private farms are still the dominant form of agricultural unit in Poland and Yugoslavia. They are linked to government planning through tax, credit and pricing policies. They also purchase the services of Machine-Tractor Stations or the collectives.

Although the models for the forms of collective agriculture were taken from Soviet experience, the process of socializing agriculture in the Eastern European context has resulted in variation in the structure and size of units within each country. In particular, the collective has taken a range of forms depending upon the amount of land and equipment held in common by the members and the extent of collective organization of work. For example, tillage associations (TOZ) are the simplest form of socialized agriculture. Members pool their resources for the common cultivation of the soil but retain ownership of lands, tools and livestock. These groups have often been established before the complete collectivization of agriculture.

Theoretical Context

Collectivization is only one form which the transformation of rural society has taken in this century. Seen as part of a strategy for economic change, the socialization of agriculture can be understood in terms of competing theoretical perspectives on development. From the standpoint of modernization theory, collectivization promotes economic growth by providing an organizational framework for the diffusion and adoption of new technologies. Economies of scale, mechanization and scientific farming principles can reduce labor requirements in the countryside and free workers to staff newly created industrial enterprises in the cities (see for example Volgyes, 1979b). Institution of the collective also provides a means by which policymakers can effect changes in the value system of the rural population by giving expression to new norms of political decision-making and social worth (Hajda, 1979).

Agricultural collectivization can also be conceptualized as a means of breaking the cycle of dependency that had linked the economies of Eastern Europe to the core of the capitalist world economy before World War II. Berend and Ranki (1974a) contend that the dominant role played by foreign capital is what most distinguished the economic development of Eastern Europe from the earlier experiences of the West. The nations of the region produced agricultural

goods for export to the West in return for manufactured goods and technology. Foreign capital facilitated this process through, for example, the construction of railroad lines that served the extraction needs of the core economies. In contrast, postwar Eastern Europe sought to increase the pace of economic development without recourse to sources of foreign capital. For Amin (1976:370-8), collectivization is part of an overall strategy for maximizing capital accumulation at the level of the state through discipline of the labor force and protection of the economy from international competition.

In essence, the agricultural collective is an organizational form which not only can accommodate many theories of development but also facilitate different strategies for economic growth and social change. Thus even within the programs of ruling Communist Parties, collectivization can serve as the basis for opposing conceptions of the relationship between the agrarian and industrial sectors of the economy. The contrast here is between the Soviet Model which stresses the transfer of resources from agriculture to the heavy industry sector of the economy and the Chinese Model which in theory proscribes that "if you have a strong desire to develop heavy industry then you will pay attention to the development of light industry and agriculture" (Mao, 1974:63).

As de Janvry (1981:94-140) contends, units of agricultural production can be the building blocks for many kinds of societies. The determining factors are the class structure of the society as a whole and control of the state. Thus although industrial development may require increased inputs from agriculture in the form of food supplies and state revenue, the means by which governments attempt to achieve this result vary. In essence, policies may favor either market incentives to encourage agricultural producers to increase their output or subsidized agricultural development projects designed to boost productivity. In choosing a specific strategy, governments are influenced by the coalition of interests that dominate the state. In particular, the political importance of the urban work force and the bureaucracy in industrializing societies favors the implementation of the second strategy which couples low food prices in the city with an expanding bureaucratic job market in the administration of agricultural development projects (Bates, 1981:4-5).

At the same time, the majority of the rural population must be reconciled to a policy which sacrifices their material interests to the demands of a development policy which offers no immediate benefits to them. Bates (1981:120) identifies four tactics that the state can adopt in relation to the peasantry: repression; co-optation; organization; and the promotion of factional conflict. It is possible to conceptualize collectivization policies in terms of each of these strategies. It may be seen as a form of politico-military coercion of a hostile population. A stratum of the rural population may be coopted into leadership roles on the collectives through control of new technologies or the administrative apparatus. Clearly collectives represent a new organizational form geared to the direct extraction of resources from the peasantry. Finally, the process of collectivization may be conceived of as a technique designed to divide

the rural population and mobilize the poorest segment in support of the government. The choice of strategies will vary according to the political base of the state, its legitimating ideology and the total resources available to it.

As indicated by the previous discussion, an examination of the role of the state is crucial to any comparative understanding of the collectivization process. The ability of the state, caught between world market imperatives and an entrenched local class structure, to reshape rural realities is an important determinant of its capacity to direct its own development. It is axiomatic to state formation¹ theorists (see for example Tilly, 1978; Skocpol, 1979; Aya, 1984) that competing centers of sovereignty must be eliminated from the territorial borders of the nation-state before state policy-makers can realize their project for the construction of a new national society.

The peasant village in prerevolutionary France and Russia is often cited as a model of a rival local authority structure. Its control of communal resources and day to day political authority gave the peasant community a real power base from which to organize resistance to the encroachments of the central state. Collective action by the communal village has figured largely in studies of rural social revolution (see for example Wolf, 1969; Womack, 1968). It is for this reason that Skocpol (1979) contends that the Bolsheviks were forced to end the power of the community by reorganizing the peasantry into collectives under state control.

In a similar vein, Jowitt (1971) approaches the problem of the collectivization of Romanian agriculture from the perspective of political development. He argues that a new state that does not go through a "breaking through" process in which old institutions and local loyalties are destroyed will be crippled in its attempt to create a new social structure.

Although this study cannot directly address the inevitability of this central tenet of the state formation argument, it can test the assumptions of the model in several ways. Firstly, by examining the relationship between areas that

¹The term "state formation" has been used in a number of ways in the literature. Anthropologists describe the earliest development of the state as an organization in human society as state formation (see for example van de Velde, 1985; Cohen, 1985). Tilly (1975) uses the term to denote the creation of state apparatuses in distinct territorial units in western Europe. My emphasis in this work is on the state as both a set of institutions (the bureaucracy or state apparatus) and the groups that control these organizations (the government or regime). During the period under analysis in Eastern Europe, state institutions were expanding their arena of activities into new areas of society and control over the state apparatus passed to new elements in society. Following Rubinson (1986), I refer to the continual expansion of state institutions and the shifting ability of groups to have their interests expressed through the regime as "state formation."

policy-makers concentrate on collectivizing first with the history of resistance to state authority experienced in those areas, we can test the priority given to state formation imperatives over other possible reasons for the collectivization of agriculture. Secondly, a corollary to state formation theories is that the ability to resist state-making initiatives depends upon the potential of groups to defend their interests through some form of collective action. Within the six countries considered in this study were a range of peasant social and political arrangements -- areas in which rural families lived on isolated homesteads, areas in which villages had no particular authority, places where villages still controlled significant pasture and forest lands, areas in which peasants had their primary political orientation through organized national peasant parties. In analyzing peasant response to collectivization drives, we can see the relationship between collective action and state formation on the basis of the specific organization of the peasant communities.

Finally, Tilly (1984:315) notes that the repertoire of collective actions available to a people at any given time "constrains the paths of a social movement and influences its outcome." Thus machine-breaking movements of the early Industrial Revolution gave way to the formation of trade unions and the institution of the strike. Since in all the countries under study, collectivization drives occurred in a series of waves, we can examine if and how the repertoire of actions by both the peasantry and the state changed over time as the new regimes became institutionalized.

It must be acknowledged here that analysis of Eastern Europe in the postwar era from a state formation perspective is complicated by the difficulty in determining exactly which states were being constructed. If a monopoly of legitimate force within a territory is the hallmark of an independent state, then control of much of the region by the Red Army of the Soviet Union would suggest the integration of Eastern Europe within an enlarged Soviet state. Yet the "derivative regimes" (Jowitt, 1971:73) established in the area were more than just bureaucracies staffed by local politicians on behalf of Soviet authorities who held real state power. Control of the state apparatus provided a base from which local elites gradually, and with varying success, were able to institutionalize their own regimes with considerable independence from Soviet domination.

Additionally, because the Soviet Union itself was changing during the period in which Eastern Europe was undergoing collectivization, both the manner in which it exerted its influence in the area and the objectives which it sought to attain were constantly evolving. While Stalin lived, the nations of Eastern Europe were treated largely as colonies of the USSR. After the ravages of the World War II, ensuring that the regimes in the area would be friendly to the Soviet Union was the ultimate objective. Particularly in the case of the army and security police, Soviet advisors functioned in supervisory capacities at every level of the bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, in the immediate postwar years local regimes showed a great deal of flexibility in dealing with specific national conditions. However with the

onset of the Cold War and the assertion of independence by the Yugoslav regime, a period ensued in which extreme subservience to Soviet doctrine was required. Policy goals in Eastern Europe reflected the Soviet model of economic development stressing heavy industry and forced collectivization of agriculture. Soviet military requirements at the time of the Korean War also played a part in the restructuring of the economies of the region.

After Stalin's death in 1953, the succession struggle within the Soviet Union had a strong impact on the personnel and policies of the Eastern European regimes. Soviet adoption of collective leadership resulted in demands that autocratic local leaders share power with their colleagues. When Malenkov initiated a New Course in the USSR, emphasizing the need to raise citizen living standards, Eastern European leaders followed suit with policies aimed at encouraging agricultural production and the growth of light industry.

Khrushchev's ascendancy resulted in the reemergence of the theme of the primacy of heavy industry and was followed by new collectivization drives in Eastern Europe. However, after denouncing Stalin's use of police terror against innocent people, Khrushchev also limited the power of the regimes in the area to suppress dissent. His efforts at rapprochement with Yugoslavia attested to the legitimacy of national communism within the socialist camp and increased the autonomy of local regimes.

Finally, the power struggle in the Kremlin and the later conflict between the Soviet Union and China increased the value of the states of Eastern Europe as allies for the Soviet leaders. Clever politicians could exploit their positions to obtain economic concessions and greater independence from Soviet power.

Overall then, the death of Stalin and Khrushchev's denunciation of him, the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956 and especially the Sino-Soviet split resulted in constant revision of the terms by which the Warsaw Pact nations were linked to the USSR. Economic exploitation of Eastern Europe in the immediate postwar period gave way to Soviet economic aid to the less industrialized countries. The domestic policies of the region's nations diverged and Romania, for example, placed considerable distance between itself and the Soviet Union on international issues. Nevertheless, Soviet intervention in Hungary and Czechoslovakia graphically demonstrated the limits of national independence in the area.

While the relationship between the Soviet Union and the states of Eastern Europe is always treated in the literature as a unique situation, it should be emphasized that state formation never occurs in a global vacuum. The literature on statemaking in the Third World provides a wide range of possible relationships between a state's position in the world economy and its autonomy relative to national class fractions. Focusing on relations of economic dependency, Kling (1968) suggests that political instability in Latin America results from the contradiction between legal independence and a colonial economy. In this situation, government office is the most accessible path to wealth and power for individuals and is thus highly contested. Within this conceptualization, the state machinery is directed towards disciplining a national labor force on behalf of

powerful external forces. State power might be great relative to subordinate classes but its actions are constrained by the interests of its international patrons.

In contrast, Evans (1979) emphasizes the independent role of the Brazilian state based on its ability to suppress worker discontent and take an active part in the production process. State leaders used these mechanisms to forge an alliance with international capital and a fraction of the national capitalist class on more equal terms.

Although support from powerful outside forces may provide a way in which the state bureaucracy can attain greater power relative to local interests, Stepan (1978:302) contends that state autonomy actually:

may be a source of weakness because a state elite is not sustained by constituencies in civil society and therefore is almost exclusively dependent upon its own internal unity and coercive powers. The other side of the coin of autonomy is thus isolation and fragility.

Given the unstable nature of a regime backed solely by the coercive forces of its own or its backer's military, state leaders face the task of assembling a constituency if one does not already exist. Hamilton's study (1982) of the Cardenas regime in Mexico provides a case study of a state mobilizing subordinate groups in society to force the government to act against the excesses of foreign and national capitalists and then institutionalizing the resulting organizations under its own control. Meeting the demands of the aroused peasants and workers helped to legitimate the state while incorporating their interests within the framework of the administration limited the groups' ability to act independently of the state. Further, control of a mobilized population gave state leaders leverage in negotiating their relationship with international and local capitalists.

State formation in Eastern Europe can be seen as a similar process. While many of the regimes had little mass base at their inception, the backing of the Red Army gave them considerable power over the national society. Policies like land reform were undertaken in an effort to attract popular support. To the extent that policies of entitlement and repression enabled them to institutionalize their regimes, Communist Party leaders became less dependent on Soviet power to keep them in office. In Yugoslavia, popular legitimation of Tito's government facilitated freedom from Soviet control. Thus although Soviet constraints limited the options of ruling Communist Parties in Eastern Europe, state formation depended on the elite's ability to organize national class interests within their own organizational framework. From this standpoint, Brzezinski (1967:99) describes the completion of the collectivization of agriculture as a measure of the internal strength of the individual Eastern European states.

Finally, collectivization must be understood as part of a larger process of social change within the Eastern European countries. Here sociological literature about the relative importance of existent "internal" class structures for determining

the outcome of social changes as compared to the demands of the world economy is particularly relevant. This debate takes many forms. In studying the transition from feudalism to capitalism in western Europe, Wallerstein (1974) emphasizes the importance of the development of an international division of labor while Brenner (1976) contends that internal agrarian structure was determinative. Describing the creation of the absolutist state, Anderson (1974) proposes a dichotomous structure in which the central state in West Europe developed primarily out of internal class conflicts while in Eastern Europe politico-military international conflicts were the motive force. Skocpol and Trimberger (1978:133) hold that the results of efforts to transform nonindustrial societies have been more dependent on the international context than "intranational pressures for equality, participation and decentralization."

Similarly, dependency theorists (see especially Frank, 1969; 1978) have concentrated their attention on the needs of metropolitan capital in the restructuring of peripheral class relations. In response, Cardoso (1972) is one of a number of theorists who have reasserted the significance of local power arrangements in determining reactions to world market imperatives. Thus Hyden's work (1980) on Tanzania provides evidence of a case in which state elites, dependent on revenues derived from export of peasant agricultural production, are relatively powerless to intervene in local class relations. In Eastern European studies, Verdery (1983) traces the interaction between participation in the world system and internal class structure in shaping the history of a village in Transylvania.

The experiences of the new states of Eastern Europe following World War II provides a unique vantage point from which to examine this question. They were primarily agricultural societies that purchased manufactured goods produced in the core of the world economy. However, except for Yugoslavia, these nations had little interaction with the world market during the immediate postwar era. Historically, the peoples living within these states had been subject to control by empires centered outside their region. In the postwar era, their subordination to the Soviet Union was quite explicit. Again with the exception of Yugoslavia, the regimes were put in power by the USSR, the Red Army occupied their territory for varied periods of time, their economies were structured around a model of development based upon earlier Soviet experience, and especially until Stalin's death, many policy decisions were made directly by Soviet authorities. Yet within these constraints local elites worked to institutionalize their own regimes. Thus collectivization policies similar in timing and direction in the five countries achieved varying results based on decisions by state policy-makers, Soviet intervention and reactions by local communities. This study provides a setting in which to assess the relative importance of particular national class structures in shaping the results of policies initiated at a supranational level.

Literature Review

The literature on collectivization of agriculture in Eastern Europe can be divided into three categories. Case studies of individual communities; empirical descriptions of state policies and their economic and social effects; and a small number of works that attempt to place the collectivization process in a comparative perspective. In the first case, emphasis has been upon the effects of collectivization on peasant life. Studies focus on changes in peasant attitudes (Sarkany, 1979; Hollos, 1983; Jevor, 1983; Skalnik, 1979), changes in family structure and the status of women (Kovacs, 1983; Stahl, 1979), the rise of peasant-workers and issues of rural/urban inequalities (Lockwood, 1973) and the interaction between state policy and the peasant community (Hann, 1985; Bell, 1984; Kideckel, 1982; Verdery, 1983; Hollos, 1982; Winner, 1971). Although adjustment of state policies in response to peasant actions is often considered on the level of the individual community, explanations are historic and not intended to imply general theories of peasant-state interaction. Based upon fieldwork conducted after the institutionalization of collective agriculture, these studies are not specifically interested in how the process occurred. Bell's study of a Hungarian mountain community is a notable exception.

The second group of studies assess postwar changes in the economy and social structure of the rural sector using the country as the unit of analysis. Within this framework, works may address changes in family structure (Cernea, 1976); structure of the labor force and rural-urban relations (Cole, 1981); and education (Georgeoff, 1979). A number of studies written from the perspective of modernization theory analyze the effects of collectivization using measures of agricultural productivity and changes in peasant value systems (see for example readings in Gati, 1974; Francisco, Laird and Laird, 1979; Volgyes, 1979). Korbonski's monograph *The Politics of Socialist Agriculture in Poland* (1965) focuses on the dilemmas faced by the Polish Communist Party caught between the demands of the Soviet Union and the resistance of peasant cultivators. Grigoroff (1956) provides a full-scale study of the land reform and collectivization drive in Bulgaria.

Comparative work on collectivization in Eastern Europe assumes a number of forms. The readings collected in Sanders (1958) trace the progress of socialized agriculture in the different nations of the region. Hoffman (1980) measures changes in a range of demographic variables for Eastern Europe since 1950. Volgyes (1980a) assesses economic changes for the same period. Wadekin (1982) emphasizes changes in state agricultural policies since 1962. He asserts that at that time priorities shifted from the creation of a socialized agrarian sector to the development of mechanisms to increase productivity and improve rural living standards. Adams (1974) and Adams and Adams (1971) are concerned with comparing the systems of agriculture that evolved in the nations of Eastern Europe with the previously developed Soviet model.