

# Development of Socialist Cooperativism in the Slovenian Part of Yugoslavia

## Communist Authorities' Attitude towards Peasants and Private Agriculture (1945–1970s)

Marta Rendla 

Institute of Contemporary History, Privoz 11 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; [marta.rendla@inz.si](mailto:marta.rendla@inz.si)

Received 23 July 2024 | Accepted 10 May 2025 | Published online 19 September 2025

**Abstract.** The article addresses the changing attitude of the communist authorities towards peasants and private agriculture in the Slovenian part of socialist Yugoslavia. The changing attitude towards peasants and private agriculture, through socialist cooperativism, was based on political, economic, and social discrimination against peasants. After years of intense political, economic, and psychological violence, a period of ideological pragmatism began following the abandonment of collectivization in 1953. The authorities sought to appease the peasants, allowing them to leave agricultural cooperatives without any consequences. Within the framework of socialist cooperation, peasants were permitted to pursue their economic interests, but they were obliged to further narrow production units to ten hectares of arable as a maximum land. In the 1960s, the authorities neglected peasants through the cooperative system, believing that large state<sup>1</sup> agricultural complexes would ensure food security. When these complexes failed to meet the growing needs for food security, the importance of private agriculture was recognized at the brink of the 1970s. At that time, the authorities changed the concept of agricultural policy, allowing peasants to modernize and invest in the upgrading of private agriculture. The productive potential of private agriculture was also incorporated into the state agricultural policy plans, giving more room for private initiative. Despite their pragmatism, the authorities did not fully shed their ideological prejudices against peasants and private agriculture until the dissolution of socialism and the state.

**Keywords:** agricultural policy, private agriculture, authorities' attitude towards peasants, socialist Slovenia

---

1 The use of the term 'state' was replaced by 'social' during the socialist period beginning in 1953, when the Yugoslav Federal Constitutional Law introduced self-management as the foundation of the social order and replaced state and cooperative ownership with social ownership—understood as ownership by everyone and by no one. Accordingly, both terms appear in this paper, depending on the context (Avsec, "Zadruga," 110).

## Introduction

In this article, I examine the evolving relationship between the communist authorities and the peasantry, as well as the transformations of agricultural policy and its implementation, through the lens of socialist agriculture and the stages of socialist agricultural cooperativism in the Slovenian part of Yugoslavia, spanning the period from 1945 to the early 1970s.

Within the framework of this new model of socialist cooperativism—which, in its objectives, diverged significantly from classical cooperativism<sup>2</sup>—the principal architect of Yugoslav agricultural policy, the Slovene Edvard Kardelj, envisioned a solution to one of the core ideological concerns of the communist regime: the peasant question, particularly the perceived threat posed by the wealthier strata of the rural population. Socialist cooperativism was conceived not only as a vehicle for the structural transformation of agriculture but also as a political instrument for the “elimination of the remnants of capitalist exploitation.”<sup>3</sup> The visions of classical Marxism, along with the theory and practice employed by the Soviet Union—the first socialist state—in addressing the peasant question, influenced significantly the Yugoslav model of agrarian policy.<sup>4</sup> At its core, Yugoslav agrarian policy adhered to the tenets of classical Marxist theory, which held that, due to the development of agriculture under capitalism—namely the centralization and concentration of land ownership and the monopolization of production through large-scale mechanized capitalist enterprises—peasants would not survive in the long term as small producers. According to Marxist theory, peasant property was expected to vanish, leaving no place for the peasant under socialism. Because of the supposed natural alliance between workers and small peasants, Slovenian communists saw revolutionary potential in the peasantry and sought to incorporate them into their ranks soon after the party had been founded in 1920. After World War II, lacking their own agrarian program, the communists turned to the Soviet mode,<sup>5</sup> using land redistribution and agrarian reform to strengthen the alliance between workers and peasants. This was intended to solidify their power and eventually reorganize peasants under socialist cooperativism.<sup>6</sup>

2 Classical cooperativism had been designed to promote the economic interests and development of the economic and social activities of its members—drawn from the small-scale economic sector, including traders, artisans, peasants, and workers—through the operation of a jointly managed enterprise (the cooperative) within a socio-economic environment dominated by the forces of capital (Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina združništva*, 150; Kovačič, “Kmetijstvo v razvoju podeželja,” 174).

3 See: Čepič, “Kmetje in združništvo.”

4 Partlič, “»Znanost«,” 430.

5 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina združništva*, 141.

6 Partlič, “»Znanost«,” 430; Lazarević, “Uvod,” 12.

As an integral part of socialist Yugoslavia, Slovenia—like other Eastern European communist states—pursued rapid industrialization modelled on the Soviet example. Agriculture was subordinated to industrial interests, and the rural population faced economic, political, and social discrimination. The reconstruction of agriculture, aligned with broader social transformation, was both an economic and a political measure, a common approach among former socialist states. Accordingly, both Yugoslavia and its Slovenian constituent followed a Marxist strategy in agricultural policy and in addressing the peasant question. This strategy sought to construct socialism as an economically efficient and socially just system by eliminating the peasantry as a distinct social class and transforming them into workers within a large-scale, industrialized, collective system of socialist agricultural production.<sup>7</sup> Yugoslav ideologues, like those in other Eastern European socialist states, accepted Soviet collectivization as a model for overcoming rural underdevelopment and securing capital for industrialization.<sup>8</sup> Despite drawing inspiration from the Soviet model, Yugoslavia deviated in both the implementation and tactics of agricultural policy. Yugoslav authorities were opposed to “hard collectivization” as implemented by Stalin. Although they temporarily pursued such policies between 1949 and 1953 to demonstrate adherence to the Stalinist line, they advocated for a more moderate path, which they referred to as the “specific path to rural collectivization”. This was to be achieved through socialist agricultural cooperativism, which Kardelj argued “could achieve more than the Russians accomplished” through collectivization. Private peasants were to be integrated into socialist agriculture through socialist cooperativism, initially by creating a relationship of dependency, and ultimately by incorporating them into the socialist agricultural sector, which, with the introduction of self-management, transitioned from state to social ownership.<sup>9</sup> The agrarian reform (1945–1948), involving the redistribution of confiscated and expropriated land, laid the groundwork for agricultural reconstruction and the resolution of the peasant question through socialist cooperativism. By creating predominantly small farms—usually under five hectares—it further fragmented peasant holdings and produced units that were often too small to sustain families or generate surpluses. While reshaping land ownership, the reform also aimed to politically integrate peasants by fostering an alliance with the proletariat. It served as a precondition for a policy that combined state and cooperative farming with numerous small private farms, which, under economic pressure, were gradually compelled to integrate into the state agricultural sector through socialist cooperativism.<sup>10</sup>

---

7 Partlič, “»Znanost«,” 430–32.

8 Swain, “Collective Farms which Work,” 1.

9 Čepič, “Spor z informbirojem,” 327–28.

10 Čepič, “Kaj, kako, zakaj,” 580.

After the World War II, the Yugoslav communist leadership—with the Slovene leadership at the forefront—adopted a strategy of gradually suppressing private agriculture while cautiously and covertly strengthening the state sector, which was to become the main focus of agricultural production. Based on an analysis of internal and external conditions, as well as the Soviet experience, the federal and republican leaderships concluded that premature radical changes to existing property relations could hinder the political consolidation of power.<sup>11</sup>

The Yugoslav ideologues of agricultural policy, led by the Slovene Edvard Kardelj, sought to fulfil the political and economic functions of agriculture—particularly the imperative of ensuring adequate food supplies—through the creation of a tripartite structure consisting of a state sector, a cooperative sector, and a smallholder-based private agricultural sector.<sup>12</sup> In this context, socialist agricultural cooperativism represented, for the authorities, an instrument for achieving the political and economic objectives underpinning their vision of agricultural policy. As an intermediary between the state and the private agricultural sectors, socialist cooperativism was intended, from a political standpoint, to serve as a mechanism for supervising, directing, and gradually integrating the dominant private agricultural sector<sup>13</sup> into the state agricultural system (following 1953, this sector was known as the ‘social agricultural sector’).<sup>14</sup> Through the new socialist cooperativism, the multitude of small farms was, as previously noted, economically compelled to integrate into the state agricultural sector.<sup>15</sup> This approach was intended to meet both political and economic objectives. The socialist cooperative agricultural sector was seen as “supporting the state in the implementation of the national economic plan.” This meant that production in the social sector, to which the privately owned sector was linked out of existential necessity, would be consolidated, thereby contributing to the overall increase in agricultural production.<sup>16</sup>

“Yugoslav agricultural policy ideologues adhered to the Marxist tradition and the Soviet model, positing that private farming, irrespective of its scale, continually presented opportunities for the reinforcement of capitalist relations in rural areas.”<sup>17</sup>

11 Prinčič, “Podržavljanje,” 121.

12 Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 100.

13 By the end of the socialist period, of the two fundamental types of agricultural holdings—private and social—private farms predominated both in number and in land area. Social agricultural enterprises managed only about 15 percent of the agricultural land held in social ownership (Kovačić, “Kmetijstvo v razvoju,” 166).

14 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina združništva*, 150, 153.

15 Čepič, “Kmetijska politika,” 891; Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 100.

16 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina združništva*, 150.

17 Partlič, “»Znanost«,” 430–32; Lazarević, “Uvod,” 12.

The wealthier private peasant—labelled a ‘kulak’—was regarded as a threat to socialism.<sup>18</sup> Although Yugoslav agrarian policy opposed a frontal assault on the ‘kulak’ following the Soviet model and advocated a gradual suppression of the private sector, its alignment with the Soviet socialist strategy diverged only in tactics, not in its ultimate objectives.<sup>19</sup> The effectiveness of the Yugoslav approach to gradually phasing out the private sector is evidenced by the record pace of de-agrarianization and the emergence of partial de-agrarianization in Yugoslavia, and even more markedly in Slovenia, although Yugoslavia was the only European socialist country to abandon the model of collective agriculture as early as 1953.<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of the 1970s, only a fifth of the rural population stayed in Slovenia, and by the early 1990s,<sup>21</sup> this proportion had decreased to a mere 7.6 percent.<sup>22</sup>

After the abandonment of collectivization, Yugoslav agricultural policy adopted a pragmatic approach by tolerating peasant producers, permitting private farms to continue their operation, and even enabling them to participate in the socialist development project.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the state imposed restrictive measures on peasants—lowering in 1953 for the second time the postwar landholding ceiling to ten hectares and banning farm mechanization until 1967. Although private farming was formally allowed, it was tightly constrained and economically suppressed. With small farms averaging just 2.5 hectares of arable land,<sup>24</sup> many peasants turned to non-agricultural work to survive.

The approach to private farming during the first two decades after the World War II—aside from the period of harsh collectivization between 1949 and 1953—can be compared to Lenin’s perspective on small private producers. His position was that the peasantry should be eliminated, but not overnight and not through violent expropriation; instead, this goal was to be achieved gradually, through the careful and deliberate structuring of labour relations, which he envisioned in the form of a new type of cooperativism.<sup>25</sup> Yugoslav agrarian policy never fully renounced the Soviet, Stalinist strategy, which reflected a crude Marxist suspicion of the peasantry, perceived as unreliable class allies of the proletariat due to their fundamentally capitalist character.<sup>26</sup> Even in the early 1970s—when agrarian overpopulation was no longer

---

18 Partlič, “»Znanost«,” 430–32; Lazarević, “Uvod,” 12.

19 Partlič, “»Znanost«,” 430–32.

20 Merl, “Sovietization.”

21 Malačič, “Razvoj prebivalstva,” 412.

22 Kovačič, “Kmetijstvo v razvoju,” 163.

23 Partlič, “»Znanost«,” 430–32.

24 Makarovič, “Družine,” 155.

25 Partlič, “»Znanost«,” 430–32.

26 Swain and Varga, “Introduction,” 308.

a pressing issue and the ‘peasant question’ had lost much of its ideological charge—only gradually did the state begin to recognize the importance of private agricultural production for national food security. It was under these circumstances that peasants were permitted to modernize, and a greater degree of private initiative was tolerated within the constraints of the existing communist system.<sup>27</sup> The landholding ceiling, set at ten hectares of arable land, was maintained up to the late 1980s. Although it was raised to 30 hectares in 1989,<sup>28</sup> the ceiling was still not fully abolished.

### **Socialist agriculture: Transition from capitalist to socialist cooperativism, 1945–1948**

In establishing socialist agriculture, Yugoslavia followed the Soviet model, yet it did not strictly adhere to Stalin’s directives or to his approach toward the private sector. It diverged both in the methods employed and in the timing of specific measures. The Yugoslav leadership adopted a strategy of gradually suppressing the private sector, opting instead for more cautiously and covertly strengthening the state sector. Following the example of the Soviet Union, the legal framework of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (1946) and the People’s Republic of Slovenia (1947) enshrined three forms of ownership: state, cooperative, and private. Among these, state ownership held the highest status. Both constitutions explicitly permitted the legislature to restrict or expropriate private property and to nationalize particular industries or enterprises, should such actions be deemed necessary in the interest of the ‘general good.’<sup>29</sup> The constitutions also stipulated that the state should direct economic development through national plans, relying primarily on the state and cooperative sectors, while exercising control over the private sector.<sup>30</sup> According to the legal profession, cooperative ownership was considered to be closer to state than to private ownership. The reconstruction of pre-war agriculture and the resolution of the peasant question were undertaken by the new communist authorities in a manner similar to that of other former socialist states under Soviet influence—through the redistribution of land, that is, through agrarian reform. This reform marked the first politico-economic intervention in land ownership relations and reflected a class-oriented political agenda with significant economic implications. Through agrarian reform, Yugoslav agricultural policy envisioned the creation of a state and cooperative agricultural sector, while maintaining a fragmented, small-scale private

---

27 *XV. Redni občni zbor*, 1.

28 *Uradni list SRS*, št. 32-2. X. 1989, 1766.

29 Avsec, “Razvoj,” 23.

30 Avsec, “Zadruga,” 109; *Ustava FLRJ 1946*.

farming sector.<sup>31</sup> The agrarian reform pursued two principal aims: first, to expropriate land from those who did not cultivate it themselves and redistribute it to those who either owned no land or possessed only small plots; and second, to transfer land into state and cooperative ownership for the establishment of state and cooperative agricultural enterprises. Expropriation was to satisfy two ideological principles: first, that land should belong to those who work it; and second, that the roots of 'capitalist' relations in the countryside should be eradicated. The agrarian maximum was set at 35 hectares of arable land or 45 hectares of total land. Through this reform, the communist authorities aimed to create a class of so-called 'middle peasants.' This process was referred to as the 'centering of the village' (*osredinjenje vasi*), in order to promote a dominant rural group capable of generating marketable surpluses.<sup>32</sup> By allocating expropriated land to smallholders, the authorities sought to achieve a political effect—namely, to secure the support of these peasants for the communist regime.

The land fund established through the agrarian reform—created via expropriations under the Agrarian Reform Act and confiscations carried out as part of the so-called 'patriotic nationalization' (February 1945–December 1946)—came to encompass one-fifth of all agricultural land recorded in the 1931 census.<sup>33</sup> Although the agrarian reform did not abolish private land ownership, it played a similar role to that of nationalizations in non-agricultural sectors of the economy.<sup>34</sup> The state acquired the majority—nearly three-quarters—of all agricultural and forested land through the agrarian reform's expropriation. A significant portion of this land was forested, and it was retained by the state.<sup>35</sup>

Although the agrarian reform aimed to create state and cooperative agricultural estates, the focus of agricultural production continued to be on private farming. In this context, as the number of larger farming estates declined and that of small and medium-sized farms increased, the overall number of farm holdings grew by 27 percent compared to the pre-war period.<sup>36</sup>

---

31 Čepič, "Kaj, kako, zakaj," 580.

32 Čepič, "Kaj, kako, zakaj," 583.

33 Čepič, "Kaj, kako, zakaj," 583.

34 Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 100. During the same period, the communist authorities also carried out the nationalization of other economic sectors in three phases. Within the framework of the so-called patriotic nationalization (from February 1945 to December 1946), laws were enacted that provided for either permanent confiscation or temporary sequestration of property as punishment. The first phase of nationalization (from 5 December to 17 December 1946) and the subsequent supplementary nationalization (in April and May 1948) led to the creation of a dominant state economic sector, which encompassed 93 percent of all economic enterprises (Prinčič, "Podržavljanje," 123–27).

35 Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 103.

36 Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 100–3; Čepič, "Oris pojavnih oblik," 179–80.

The agrarian reform was complemented by the establishment of socialist cooperativism in the reconstruction of agriculture and the resolution of the peasant question. Socialist agriculture, incorporating the state, cooperative, and private agricultural sectors, was established between 1945 and 1948, concurrently with the dismantling of the pre-war agricultural framework. The pre-war cooperative institutional structure, including all types of cooperatives and cooperative unions, was dismantled by 1947. This meant that cooperative property was either nationalized or transferred to a fund for the reconstruction and support of cooperativism. The parallel establishment of socialist cooperativism continued until 1949, based on the first general cooperative law in 1946. As a general law, like pre-war cooperativism, it envisaged all types of cooperatives.<sup>37</sup> On its basis, by 1948, procurement-marketing cooperatives were established to supply the population together with reconstruction cooperatives and various specialized agricultural cooperatives. Cooperatives with similar activities and operational areas were grouped into business associations, including district cooperative unions, general agricultural cooperatives, and specialized agricultural cooperatives. Agricultural procurement-marketing cooperatives became dominant in 1947, and by 1948, they had developed into a significant force in rural areas.<sup>38</sup> In the autumn of 1947, agricultural procurement-marketing cooperativism was consolidated at the republic level into the Republic Business Association of Procurement-Marketing Cooperatives whose task was to supply agricultural procurement-marketing cooperatives and consumer cooperatives with consumer goods and items subject to planned distribution through district business associations. Additionally, it was to assist the state in the compulsory purchase of agricultural products and organize the procurement of surplus and other agricultural goods through district business associations or local cooperatives.<sup>39</sup>

As a specific form of cooperatives, the first cooperative law of 1946 included for the first time peasant labour cooperatives (*kmečke delovne/obdelovalne zadruge*), which were the Yugoslav version of Soviet kolkhozes.<sup>40</sup> Peasant labour cooperatives were to engage in collective farming, that is, in the collective cultivation of land and joint production. While the first general cooperative law, like its pre-war predecessor, provided for all types of cooperatives, it was different in the objectives of cooperatives compared to the pre-war cooperative law. Pre-war, classical cooperativism aimed to promote and strengthen the economic and social position of its members through the cooperative as a collective enterprise. In contrast, the objective

---

37 *Splošni zakon o zadrugah 1946.*

38 Čeferin, "Zadružništvo," 2.

39 Čeferin, "Organizacija kmetijstva," 3–4; Čeferin, "Zadružništvo," 9–10; Čeferin, "Poslovne zveze," 1.

40 "Pregled predpisov," 1, 4.

of cooperatives under the 1946 general cooperative law was to assist the state in improving people's welfare and to support the state in implementing its economic plans. The law defined cooperatives as "voluntary economic organizations of the working people, which, for the development of the national economy, link and promote agricultural production and craftsmanship through collective work, while fostering initiative among the broadest masses of people in the countryside and cities in organizing production, supply, and distribution of goods."<sup>41</sup>

During the period of establishing socialist cooperativism, the authorities mostly focused on the establishment of cooperative stores, known as procurement-marketing cooperatives (*naproz-e*), reconstruction cooperatives, and various specialized agricultural cooperatives. While establishing a commercial and supply network within the state and cooperative sectors, due to initial difficulties, the authorities tolerated individual private entrepreneurs in trade, crafts, hospitality, and agriculture up to the end of 1946. However, once they assessed that they had solidified their position and that the state economic sector had expanded sufficiently, in 1947 they transitioned to a centrally planned economy modelled on the Soviet Union. At this point, the government decided to nationalize the businesses of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs.<sup>42</sup> In the autumn of 1947, a decision was made to abolish private trade<sup>43</sup> and reorganize cooperative trade. In 1947, cooperative trade was split into consumer cooperatives for supplying urban and industrial centres and agricultural procurement-marketing cooperatives for supplying rural areas. Since the task of cooperative stores—agricultural procurement-marketing cooperatives for supplying rural areas—was to ensure supply, they continually intervened in their members' farm operations from sowing to harvest.<sup>44</sup>

In 1948, the cooperative sector underwent a transformation, consolidating the various types of cooperatives into general agricultural cooperatives. These cooperatives took on the function of cooperative stores, and by June 1948, their number had grown to 1,151.<sup>45</sup> In April 1948, a decree was enacted to abolish private trade. As a result, trade was limited to the state and cooperative sectors, as with the implementation of the decree prohibiting private trade, those private businesses that had resisted the difficult operating conditions compared to the state and cooperative sectors, were also nationalized.<sup>46</sup> According to the assessment of the Yugoslav communist leadership, this marked the end of the struggle to eliminate capitalist elements.<sup>47</sup>

---

41 "Pregled predpisov," 5.

42 Prinčič, "Podržavljanje," 127; Čepič, "Kmetijska politika," 895.

43 Čepič, "Kmetijska politika," 895.

44 Čeferin, "Zadružništvo," 6–8.

45 "Pregled predpisov," 21; Čeferin, "Zadružništvo," 15–16.

46 Prinčič, "Podržavljanje," 127; Čepič, "Kmetijska politika," 895.

47 Prinčič, "Podržavljanje," 127.

The agrarian reform led to even more agricultural fragmentation than before the war, while the newly established state and cooperative enterprises were still far from fulfilling their intended organizational and economic roles—resulting in supply disruptions for the population in 1948.<sup>48</sup> The disturbances in supply were further complicated in the summer of 1948 by the dispute with the Soviet Union. At the Comintern meeting in June 1948, the Soviet Union accused Yugoslavia of failing to follow Moscow’s directives on how to build socialism according to the Soviet model. Stalin accused Yugoslav leader Tito—who had initiated collectivization as early as 1945 without awaiting a signal from Moscow—of underestimating kulak resistance and neglecting the role of class struggle in the process. In this context, efforts were launched to find ways to increase agricultural production. In pursuit of this goal, the approach toward peasants and the tactics for dealing with them also changed.

### General agricultural cooperativism and compulsory collectivization

General agricultural cooperativism and compulsory collectivization refer to the period from March 1948 to July 1952, or more broadly until 1953. This phase is marked by the establishment of general agricultural cooperatives in 1948, followed by, and particularly characterized by, the creation of peasant labour cooperatives from 1949 onward. State policy—more specifically, the article by Edvard Kardelj, entitled “Agricultural Cooperativism in a Planned Economy,” published in the journal *Komunist* in 1947—provided the ideological foundation for this process. Kardelj argued that the agricultural cooperative represented the most suitable form for transforming agriculture, increasing agricultural production, ensuring food supply, and raising the cultural level of the peasantry. These conclusions initiated the rapid and centrally directed implementation of general agricultural cooperatives.<sup>49</sup>

The centralization of state policy around agricultural cooperatives, up to March 1948, entailed the decentralization of existing agricultural purchasing and sales cooperatives. This process was implemented by establishing new general agricultural cooperatives in nearly every locality or by reorganizing the existing purchasing and sales cooperatives into agricultural cooperatives. The formation of general agricultural cooperatives involved the merger of existing specialized cooperatives—such as those focused on livestock production, timber processing, and post-war reconstruction (in areas where reconstruction had already been completed)—into unified agricultural cooperatives. The introduction of a new system of controlled

48 Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 104–5.

49 “Pregled predpisov,” 21.

trade, which was taken over by the agricultural cooperatives, was also played a crucial role in this transformation.<sup>50</sup>

General agricultural cooperatives, typically established to cover the area of a single village, were intended to engage in joint procurement and sales, their own agricultural production and processing, forestry, and small-scale industrial craft activities to meet the needs of their members.<sup>51</sup> Among other services, they developed production cooperation and rural credit and savings schemes. They also took responsibility for technological modernization, as well as the professional and social education of peasants.<sup>52</sup> They combined commercial, production, and service functions for their members. Until the early 1950s, due to the general postwar scarcity, the exchange of goods was conducted through these cooperatives according to the principles of planned distribution. They functioned as a type of rural retail outlet through which rationed supply was distributed up to the end of 1947, followed by guaranteed supply from the beginning of 1948 onward.<sup>53</sup>

In 1948, Yugoslav agriculture found itself in an extremely critical position, brought on by the country's international economic isolation and the growing need to supply an expanding non-agrarian population. In response to supply disruptions, the authorities opted to increase agricultural production by exerting heightened pressure on the peasants and initiating a reorganization of the agricultural sector. At the beginning of 1948, the burden of provisioning the population, which had previously been done through a system of rationed supply, was transformed into a system of guaranteed supply. In both supply systems, peasants were required, under state-imposed conditions, to deliver a fixed or prescribed share of their agricultural output to the state. Officially, the guaranteed supply system operated through state purchase at so-called fixed (or 'bound') prices, but in practice, this frequently took the form of confiscation. Peasants were often unwilling to surrender their produce, and many were simply unable to meet the state's quotas. Consequently, they consistently resisted the procurement system through passive concealment and hoarding their yields. In such circumstances, state authorities forcibly confiscated produce, penalized peasants, and labelled them as enemies of the regime. Compulsory procurement or delivery quotas were imposed on every peasant household, though in practice, the procurement policy targeted primarily the wealthier peasants—the kulaks. The authorities regarded any peasant who failed to fulfil state obligations as a wealthy kulak, regardless of their actual means. Nevertheless, it was primarily larger

---

50 "Pregled predpisov," 21; Čeferin, "Zadružništvo," 15–16.

51 Avsec, "Zadruge," 110.

52 *Kmetijsko zadružništvo*, 21.

53 Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 106; Čepič, "Kmetijska politika," 891; Čepič, *Preskrba prebivalstva*, 893.

landholders—who, in principle, had surplus produce—who were subjected to the strongest pressure. As peasants hid their yields and state agents enforced procurements through violence and even physical punishment, the relationship between the state and the peasantry came to resemble a form of war.<sup>54</sup>

In the system of controlled trade, which in practice involved linking the supply of industrial consumer goods to peasants with their delivery of produce to cooperatives, the relationship between the state and the peasants led to a status-based differentiation of the peasantry. Smaller peasants received higher economic benefits for cooperating with the socialist sector, while larger and wealthier peasants were discriminated against both in terms of purchase prices and the provision of industrial goods.<sup>55</sup>

The Cooperative Law, titled *The Fundamental Law on Agricultural Cooperatives*, which established and defined general agricultural cooperatives and peasant agricultural cooperatives, and exceptionally also other types of agricultural cooperatives, was adopted in 1949. It addressed agricultural cooperatives and peasant labour cooperatives separately, defining the activities of agricultural cooperatives and the four forms of peasant labour cooperatives.<sup>56</sup> Regarding membership, the law stipulated that all three types of agricultural cooperatives (general, agricultural, and other forms) were to include working peasants with the aim of “improving agricultural production, raising living standards, and building socialism in the countryside.” However, only in exceptional cases, were wealthy peasants allowed to become members, and only if they demonstrated appropriate loyalty to the state and provided a guarantee that they would adhere to cooperative rules and fulfil their obligations to the cooperative. Those sentenced to the loss of their civil rights could not become members, nor could they be elected to the cooperative’s governing bodies during their sentence.<sup>57</sup>

The Cooperative Law (1949) defined general agricultural cooperatives as organizations “in which peasants unite to regulate and improve agricultural production and other types of economic activity on their own holdings in a coordinated manner; to organize joint production on cooperative farms; to collectively market their produce and procure industrial goods—with the aim of improving their economic and cultural conditions and eliminating capitalist and speculative elements from the countryside.”<sup>58</sup> In addition to uniting peasants and supporting them in improving production on their individual farms, general agricultural cooperatives were also

54 Čepič, “Kaj, kako, zakaj,” 585–86.

55 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina zadružništva*, 165–66.

56 “Pregled predpisov,” 13; *Uradni list FLRJ*, 49–411, 9. 6. 1949, 711.

57 “Pregled predpisov,” 14.

58 Čeferin, “Pregled zadružnega,” 5.

tasked with organizing cooperative estates—*zadružne ekonomije*—on which collective production was to be established. These cooperative estates were intended to serve as the embryonic form of future peasant labour cooperatives and the nucleus of the socialist economy in the countryside. In practice, most peasant labour cooperatives in Slovenia emerged from these cooperative estates.<sup>59</sup>

General agricultural cooperatives, typically established at the level of a single village, were, as previously noted, organized into district unions of agricultural cooperatives. These district unions primarily fulfilled organizational, supervisory, and auditing functions. In addition to their role in trade, general agricultural cooperatives were expected to promote all branches of agriculture and forestry, as well as to purchase agricultural produce and products. They aimed to mobilize as broad a base of small and medium-sized peasants as possible, to support the modernization of agriculture, to organize the processing of agricultural goods and small-scale craft workshops, to collect savings deposits and issue loans, and to contribute to the cultural advancement of the rural population.<sup>60</sup>

Although some advocates of rapid collectivization emerged immediately after the World War II, a more moderate approach ultimately prevailed. This moderate line viewed collectivization as a long-term goal to be achieved gradually and through softer methods. The 'soft path' was to be realized through socialist cooperativism. In the context of establishing and developing general cooperatives, socialist cooperativism in Yugoslavia had, by 1948, already conceptualized and initiated the formation of collective cooperatives—Yugoslav variants of the Soviet kolkhozes—referred to as agricultural labour cooperatives (*kmečke delovne zadruge*). From the outset, socialist agricultural policy in Yugoslavia encompassed not only cooperative agriculture but also state agriculture sector (later the term state was replaced by the term social) as integral components of its ideological and institutional framework.<sup>61</sup> As the path toward the establishment of state agriculture was intended to be more gradual and less coercive than the Soviet model, priority was given to the development of general agricultural cooperatives. By 1948, a total of sixty-seven agricultural labour cooperatives had been established in Slovenia. Within the framework of agrarian reform and colonization, these peasant labour cooperatives were primarily viticultural in character. They emerged in the wine-growing regions of northern, northeastern, southeastern, and western Slovenia on land allocated to agrarian applicants and colonists—former vineyard workers (*viničarji*)—from the state land fund created from expropriated estates.<sup>62</sup>

---

59 Čeferin, "Pregled zadružnega," 5.

60 Čeferin, "Zadružništvo," 15, 17; "Pregled predpisov," 22.

61 *Kmetijsko zadružništvo*, 25.

62 Čeferin, "Zadružništvo," 19.

In the autumn of 1948, Edvard Kardelj reaffirmed that “the Communist Party of Yugoslavia does not intend, nor has it ever intended, to impose a new socialist form on the peasants and other small producers,” referring specifically to the Soviet kolkhoz model.<sup>63</sup> While Kardelj acknowledged that such forms of collective agriculture could represent an ideal, he was fully aware that few peasants were actually willing to enter such systems of production. Similarly, Boris Kidrič, one of the highest-ranking Slovene party leaders, stated clearly in mid-1948 that rapid collectivization—i.e., a frontal assault on the kulak—was not feasible, as it could lead to famine the following year, given that forty percent of the agricultural production remained in kulak hands. Moreover, there were neither cooperatives nor agricultural machinery available for farming at a higher level of mechanization. The political line, therefore, was not to be one of open confrontation but rather of gradual pressure: the undermining of kulak speculation and the promotion of working peasants. By “working peasants,” he referred to small and medium-sized peasants.<sup>64</sup> Although Yugoslav leaders initially rejected forced collectivization and the Soviet kolkhoz model, growing economic hardship, isolation, and internal party pressures led to a policy shift in 1949. The Communist Party decided to accelerate collectivization, eliminate the kulaks as a class, and establish peasant labour cooperatives.<sup>65</sup>

Collective farming was expected to boost production, enable mechanization, and support the non-agrarian population,<sup>66</sup> while also serving as a means of political control and class struggle in the countryside.<sup>67</sup>

By the spring of 1949, the collectivization process quickly advanced. They systematically envisaged four types of cooperatives. Common to all of them was that peasants contributed all their productive assets to the cooperatives, except for residential buildings, a so-called homestead (a small piece of land they could keep), small tools, and small livestock. The typology of cooperatives was based on ownership and compensation for the use of the land upon joining the cooperative. Collectivization in Slovenia meant that members of peasant labour cooperatives combined their land into the cooperative and jointly cultivated it under specific conditions and obligations. Peasants, who were members of peasant labour cooperatives, retained ownership of their land, except in one type of such cooperative, but it was managed by the cooperative. Peasants contributed their land to the peasant labour cooperative as a lease. Most commonly, peasants joined the cooperative with their land for a period of three years.<sup>68</sup>

63 Čeferin, “Organizacija kmetijstva,” 3–4; Čeferin, “Zadružništvo,” 10.

64 Čepič, “Spor z informbirojem,” 327–29.

65 Čepič, “Spor z informbirojem,” 331–33.

66 Čepič, “Kaj, kako, zakaj,” 586; Čeferin, “Zadružništvo,” 20.

67 Čepič, “Kaj, kako, zakaj,” 589.

68 Čepič, “Kaj, kako, zakaj,” 589.

Collectivization meant expropriation in only one type of peasant labour cooperative. However, even land contributed as a lease, managed by the cooperative, had a similar effect. In reality, this was an economic nationalization without changing land ownership. Members were required to cultivate the land for modest compensation, and the efficiency of brigade-organized work was measured by norms.<sup>69</sup> Initially, there were no significant differences between the various types of peasant labour cooperatives, as general assemblies typically decided not to pay cooperative members either lease fees or interest. It was only after 1951 that cooperatives began to recognize land rent as a legitimate entitlement for members.<sup>70</sup>

Peasants in Yugoslavia, including Slovenia, generally joined the four types of peasant labour cooperatives voluntarily, based on leasing conditions. However, due to violations of voluntariness and poor management, collectivization faced significant resistance. Yugoslav collectivization was among the most drastic in communist Europe, marked by economic, political, and psychological violence.<sup>71</sup> Peasants resisted joining cooperatives mainly due to ownership and property concerns. Even when forced to join, resistance persisted, often as passive opposition. Peasants typically sold surplus crops or livestock before joining and entered with minimal assets. They focused more on their small plots than on cooperative land, sometimes using cooperative resources for personal cultivation. Through opportunistic actions, peasants undermined the effectiveness of collectivization.<sup>72</sup>

Due to both economic and political failure, collectivization was effectively 'frozen' at its peak in 1951, when there were 386 peasant labour cooperatives in Slovenia. At this point, these cooperatives were also integrated into broader structures. Based on two Yugoslav government decrees issued in August 1950—one on the allocation of tractors, agricultural machinery, and tools to peasant production cooperatives, and the other on managing the Fund for Mechanization and Investment in Cooperative Agriculture—by the end of 1950 and throughout 1951, cooperative funds were established at the district level.<sup>73</sup> In April 1951, the Main Directorate for Cooperative Agriculture was established as an independent body within these funds and as an interest association of peasant labour cooperatives. Its role mirrored that of the Republic Union of Agricultural Cooperatives in Ljubljana, which had been formed in May 1950 and succeeded the Republic Business Union of Procurement and Sales Cooperatives. The Main Directorate was tasked with strengthening peasant

---

69 Čepič, "Oris pojavnih oblik," 186; Veselinov, *Sumrak seljaštva*, 36.

70 Čeferin, "Organizacija kmetijstva," 9; Čeferin, "Zadružništvo," 20.

71 Swain, "Eastern European Collectivisation," 497–534.

72 Allcock, *The collectivization*, 29–37.

73 Čeferin, "Organizacija kmetijstva," 10–11; Čeferin, "Zadružništvo," 24.

labour cooperatives and cooperative farms both economically and organizationally, while overseeing the advancement and accelerated development of agricultural production.<sup>74</sup> The coexistence of general agricultural cooperatives and peasant labour cooperatives, each with its own interest association, created a dual-track system within agricultural cooperativism.

At the peak of collectivization in Yugoslavia, a cooperative structure emerged, reflecting significant regional differences in economic development and political approaches. Collectivization was more extensive in less developed areas, such as Macedonia and Montenegro, where fragmented landholdings were common. By June 1951, peasant labour cooperatives controlled 91.5 percent of arable land in Macedonia and 76.8 percent in Montenegro.<sup>75</sup>

In contrast, peasant labour cooperatives in Slovenia held only 3.9 percent of the country's total agricultural land and 5.9 percent of arable land. Land contributed by members accounted for just 2.6 percent of Slovenia's agricultural area. By 1953, only 5.3 percent of the peasant population—which made up 52.4 percent of the total population—had joined these cooperatives.<sup>76</sup> Membership was dominated by smallholders, a pattern seen throughout Yugoslavia and consistent with the ideological narrative of an alliance between the working class and small peasants.<sup>77</sup> Economically, peasant labour cooperatives remained weak and failed to meet expectations in terms of output and market supply. Despite collective cultivation, their productivity lagged significantly behind that of private peasants.<sup>78</sup>

### Socialist cooperation in the 1950s

Collectivization was officially abandoned in 1953 due to its economic inefficiency and political failure. However, this retreat did not undermine the long-term goals of agricultural policy; rather, it reflected a strategic shift in the state's approach to private farming. Leading Slovenian politicians made it clear that the ideological objective remained unchanged.

In a 1951 speech, Boris Kidrič warned that the return of capitalism in agriculture would not be tolerated—clearly referring to private farming. Tito reinforced this position in September 1951, stating that collectivization had never been intended as

74 Čeferin, "Organizacija kmetijstva," 25.

75 Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 111.

76 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina zadružništva*, 172; Čeferin, "Organizacija kmetijstva," 9; Kmetijsko zadružništvo, 1–3; "Pregled predpisov," 26–27.

77 Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 111–12.

78 Tochitch, "Collectivization in Yugoslavia," 26–42.

a short-term experiment.<sup>79</sup> The abandonment of collectivization was thus a tactical move aimed at calming the rural population after years of coercion and violence. New legislation allowed peasants to exit peasant labour cooperatives without facing sanctions.

The core objective of agricultural policy remained the “unification and socialization of land” through investment in modernization and the development of suitable cooperative structures. These were intended to boost agricultural production while aligning with the material interests of peasants—a politically more pragmatic approach. According to Edvard Kardelj, the forced collectivization measures of 1949–1953 had already “cut the roots of capitalism in our villages,” making it counterproductive to continue with the same methods, which would only lead to “severe economic defeats.”<sup>80</sup>

In the broader context of abandoning central planning and introducing workers’ self-management and gradual liberalization, the early 1950s marked a shift toward ideological pragmatism in relation to private agriculture. While the ultimate goal of cooperatives remained the socialization of land, greater respect was shown for private ownership. This intention was formalized in the 1957 resolution of the Federal Assembly, which declared that future agricultural policy would proceed without violent intervention in individual land ownership.<sup>81</sup> Acknowledging the economic interests of private peasants was a crucial step toward stabilizing the countryside after years of coercion and expropriation.

By the mid-1950s, Yugoslavia, including Slovenia, began pursuing a more balanced model of economic development. Heavy industry lost its privileged status, and new policies emphasized more equitable growth across all sectors, and greater attention to the living standards of the working population. This shift brought increased investment in both the processing industry and agriculture.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, the core objectives of agricultural policy remained unchanged. Agricultural production was still expected to centre on the social (formerly state-owned) agricultural sector. The restructured cooperative sector was intended to complement it through the concept of socialist cooperation, functioning as a mechanism to integrate farmers into so-called “socialist production relations.” A key feature of this concept was a formal balance between the social and cooperative agricultural sectors, alongside protective measures to uphold socialist relations and prevent the resurgence of capitalist elements.

---

79 Allcock, *The collectivization*, 19–20.

80 Kardelj, *Problemi socialistične politike*, 14–17.

81 Veselinov, *Sumrak seljaštva*, 50.

82 Prinčič, “Slovensko gospodarstvo,” 170.

Following the abolition of collectivization in 1953, landholding limits were revised. The previous ceiling of 35 hectares of arable land was reduced to 10 hectares per household, leading to further land nationalization and a continuation of agrarian reform. Land above the new limit was nationalized, with compensation based on estimated yields. The total maximum for agricultural land—including arable, non-arable land, and forests—remained at 45 hectares, as established by earlier agrarian reform, though it could be increased under certain conditions according to the 1948 Agrarian Reform and Colonization Act in Slovenia.<sup>83</sup>

During the period of socialist cooperation, which in practice replaced mandatory procurement with contract-based arrangements, the 1950s witnessed a revival and expansion of general agricultural cooperatives.<sup>84</sup> By the mid-1950s, 62 percent of all purely agricultural households were cooperative members. On a voluntary basis, new forms of collaboration emerged between peasants and cooperative estates—such as the shared use of agricultural machinery, pastures, forests, and joint efforts to renew vineyards and orchards.<sup>85</sup> This revival was accompanied by significant institutional changes. The 1954 Regulation on Agricultural Cooperatives required cooperatives to focus exclusively on agricultural activities. At the same time, workers gained the right to participate in cooperative management, and cooperative property was redefined as social property. Non-agricultural activities were restructured into separate cooperative enterprises, crafts, or workshops. The shift to social ownership, understood as property belonging to everyone and no one, meant that these cooperative enterprises became legally and functionally independent from their founding cooperatives. As the system of workers' self-management expanded, agricultural cooperatives increasingly lost their distinct identity and gradually came to resemble social enterprises. This transformation also weakened the role of traditional cooperative bodies, reducing peasants' influence within them in favour of growing worker control.<sup>86</sup>

### **1960s socialist cooperation and the economic and social integration of peasants into society**

Although agricultural policy in the mid-1950s acknowledged the private agricultural sector alongside the social (formerly state) sector and recognized its economic

83 Čepič, "Oris pojavnih oblik," 187.

84 Čeferin, "Organizacija kmetijstva," 28.

85 Čeferin, "Organizacija kmetijstva," 14; *Kmetijsko združništvo*, 25; "Kmetijsko združništvo v Sloveniji," 4.

86 Avsec, "Zadruge," 111.

potential, by the end of the decade, concern over agriculture's lag behind other economic sectors decisively shifted the focus back to the social sector. The aim was to integrate private farming into the social agricultural sector through various forms of cooperative collaboration, thereby narrowing the developmental gap. From the late 1950s onward, agricultural policy prioritized the formation of large-scale production units capable of organizing efficient production with the aid of modern technology and scientific methods. Cooperatives were expected to expand and evolve into agro-combines.<sup>87</sup>

In the 1960s, the prevailing belief was that social agriculture would fully ensure food security. As a result, cooperatives were reorganized at the beginning of the decade, and investments were increasingly directed toward the social sector. Cooperatives were becoming similar to social (i.e., socially owned) enterprises, with peasants reduced to contractors in cooperative production, holding little real influence over operations. Worker self-management structures became more prominent within cooperatives, further marginalizing peasants. This led to a general decline of interest in agriculture, especially among rural youth, who increasingly sought employment outside the agricultural sector. Cooperatives gradually entered a phase of organizational decline.<sup>88</sup>

In the 1960s, agricultural cooperatives increasingly neglected the needs of their members, aligning instead with the interests of internal work collectives. The dominant focus on developing agro-combines marginalized the potential of private agriculture. As a result, ties between peasants and cooperatives weakened, often reduced to minimal transactional cooperation. Peasants no longer perceived cooperatives as their own organizations, but rather as business partners—or even competitors—whose interests diverged from theirs.<sup>89</sup>

Economic discrimination against peasants further undermined the profitability and productivity of private agriculture. In Slovenia, as elsewhere in Yugoslavia, private farms consistently underperformed relative to the social agricultural sector, largely due to state-imposed price policies and administrative restrictions on investment. From the 1960s onward, the productivity and profitability gap widened significantly, to the long-term detriment of private agriculture.<sup>90</sup> This period also saw a broader process of de-agrarianization, which gradually resolved the issue of agrarian overpopulation. Large-scale rural-to-urban migration, combined with growing employment in industry and services—and, increasingly from the 1960s,

---

87 Čeferin and Avsec, *Zadružništvo pri nas*, 53–54.

88 *Kmetijsko zadružništvo*, 22–27; Avsec, “Kmetijsko zadružništvo,” 4–5.

89 “Andrej Petelin, Predsednik,” 9.

90 Stipetić and Bojnec, “Proizvodna funkcija,” 79–90; Nishimizu and Page, “Total Factor,” 920–36; Hofler and Payne, “Efficiency,” 153–57.

labour migration to Western Europe—diminished the social and political weight of the peasant population. The ideological ‘class approach’ to rural policy receded, along with fears of a resurgent wealthy peasantry.<sup>91</sup>

Amid Yugoslavia’s political liberalization, global opening, and broader socio-economic development, the second half of the 1960s marked a turning point. The rigid ideological stance toward private agriculture was gradually abandoned, and its role in ensuring food security was increasingly acknowledged. At the turn of the 1970s, a new agricultural policy concept emerged, focused on modernizing and integrating private farms. In 1967, restrictions on the purchase of heavy machinery and other production equipment were lifted.<sup>92</sup> A series of measures followed to support the modernization of private agriculture. In 1969, the legal framework for savings and credit services for agricultural and forestry working organizations was established. By the early 1970s, these services had been expanded to include state support for advisory services in agricultural cooperatives and enterprises, partial interest rate subsidies, and various incentives promoting production and business cooperation among peasants.<sup>93</sup>

The private (economic) sector began to play a more prominent role in long-term development plans, and small private initiatives in crafts and agriculture gained legitimacy. Peasants were granted the right to participate in the market independently by selling their products directly to end consumers.<sup>94</sup>

This shift brought renewed attention to the issue of land ownership limits. The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution introduced the possibility of leasing agricultural land, allowing individuals to exceed the maximum landholding size—provided the leased land would otherwise remain uncultivated.<sup>95</sup> Agriculture also benefited from a correction in relative price ratios, which improved the sector’s overall economic position. In tax policy, there was a move away from politically determined progressive tax rates toward a more structured system based on cadastral income, with deductions for material production costs. From 1971 onward, the vast majority of agricultural income tax was assessed according to cadastral income rather than actual earnings.<sup>96</sup>

---

91 Lazarević, “Uvod,” 14.

92 Lazarević, “Uvod,” 14; Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina zadružništva*, 184–85, 196–97.

93 Avsec, “Zadruga,” 111.

94 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina zadružništva*, 196.

95 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina zadružništva*, 186.

96 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina zadružništva*, 186.

## The Yugoslav (Slovenian) approach to private agriculture

In the initial period from 1945 to 1948, when the first phase of Soviet policy in Eastern Europe was not aimed at Sovietization, Yugoslavia and, with it, its Slovenian part, carried out ‘self-Sovietization,’ as Stephan Merl called the process. Merl writes synthetically about the dilemmas of Soviet agricultural policy planners and the ways of implementing this policy in socialist countries. In the first phase, the Soviet Union focused on ensuring political power in all Eastern European countries. To legitimize the rule of new governments that unreservedly supported the Soviet model, land redistribution in agriculture and nationalization of heavy industry were carried out. The confiscation of property, to strengthen the legitimacy of the new regime, was mostly directed against collaborators and war criminals. It is important to highlight that, compared to Yugoslavia, the Soviet transfer of reforms to Eastern European countries in the form of land redistribution did not include the ‘nationalization’ of land. Land redistribution was mainly aimed at increasing the popularity of Soviet authority rather than enforcing a break with tradition.<sup>97</sup>

In Yugoslavia, however, the situation unfolded differently. In the agricultural sector, the new communist government implemented agrarian reform and colonization, which, like in other Soviet-aligned states, involved a form of land redistribution. Through this political strategy, the regime aimed to consolidate its power and secure the support of the peasantry, which constituted the majority of the population. Redistribution was primarily achieved through the confiscation and expropriation of land from large landowners—those deemed to possess excessive holdings. The land thus acquired was transferred into a land fund, from which it was reallocated to land-poor peasants, in line with the principle of providing land to those who tilled it. Simultaneously, portions of this land were transferred into state ownership for the establishment of state agricultural enterprises and into cooperative ownership for the development of the cooperative sector. Most of the confiscated land in Slovenia (63.5 percent) consisted of forests that were retained by the state. Only 6.7 percent of arable land was allocated to land-poor peasants, while 13.4 percent of all confiscated land was distributed to settlers and small peasants. Around 4.5 percent of farms—those exceeding 35 hectares—were affected by the reform, which established a land ceiling of 45 hectares (or 35 hectares of arable land). The reform reduced the number of large estates and increased the prevalence of smaller farms, contributing to further fragmentation of landholdings.<sup>98</sup>

Through land redistribution, the communist authorities formally upheld private property while simultaneously nationalizing most confiscated land and promoting

---

97 Merl, “Sovietization.”

98 Lazarević, *Delo in zemlja*, 100.

collectivization as the highest form of collective agriculture. By early 1949, prior to the large-scale collectivization campaign, about 3 percent of peasants in Yugoslavia were already integrated into agricultural labour cooperatives.<sup>99</sup>

Collectivization in Yugoslavia began in 1945–1946, alongside similar efforts in Bulgaria and Albania. Unlike in other Eastern European countries, where Stalin initially forbade direct Sovietization or even public discussion of collectivization, Yugoslavia pursued a more autonomous path. Tito's growing independence culminated in the 1948 break with Moscow. Through agrarian reform, the Yugoslav communist regime satisfied two key ideological goals: implementing the principle that land should belong to those who cultivated it and politically consolidating power by targeting collaborators and war criminals. At the same time, the regime aimed to eliminate 'capitalist' exploitation in the countryside.<sup>100</sup>

Yugoslavia's tactic of nationalizing most of the economy, implementing a soft phase of collectivization, and developing a general type of socialist cooperativism with the predominance of general agricultural cooperatives differed from most European socialist countries at this stage. Yugoslavia was rushing to break away from capitalism and tradition by establishing socialism. Meanwhile, the new regimes of most European communist countries maintained existing economic systems, which were similar to centrally planned economies.<sup>101</sup>

The Sovietization of most Eastern European countries under Soviet influence began in 1948–1949 in response to the Western invitation to participate in the Marshall Plan. Thereafter, all Soviet-aligned countries adopted centrally planned economies and emulated the Soviet model of forced industrialization via five-year plans—despite lacking the economic foundations for such a system. Between 1948–1949 and Stalin's death in 1953, this phase was marked by a rigid and dogmatic transfer of the supposed Soviet model of development.<sup>102</sup>

Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, and Hungary adopted a modified version of the Soviet kolkhoz model, combining state agricultural enterprises with cooperative structures.<sup>103</sup> Despite Stalin's death in 1953, all European communist states—with the exception of Yugoslavia—remained formally committed to collectivization. In Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania, collective agriculture based on the Soviet model was fully implemented.<sup>104</sup> Private farming, however, con-

99 Veselinov, *Sumrak seljaštva*, 37.

100 Lazarević, Rendla, and Sedlaček, *Zgodovina združništva*, 147.

101 Merl, "Sovietization."

102 Merl, "Sovietization."

103 Lazarević, "Uvod," 20.

104 Merl, "Sovietization."

tinued to dominate in Poland and Yugoslavia.<sup>105</sup> Although Poland did not officially abandon collectivization, it never completed the process, largely due to the opposition of leading political figure Władysław Gomułka, who rejected collectivization as a strategic goal.<sup>106</sup>

Although the socialist countries listed did not abandon collectivization, they allowed peasants to have a small piece of land. Homesteads were important in all socialist countries. In the context of the Yugoslav and, with it, the Slovenian model of approaching private agriculture, the Hungarian version of agricultural policy also stood out with reforms from the late 1960s. Despite the constraint of cultivation on a small area of 0.7 hectare, it first enabled self-sufficiency for a large part of the population and, through the market, the sale of produce to the non-agricultural population and the cooperative or state sector. By alleviating the burden through small-scale private farming, the state and cooperative agricultural sectors could also export surplus production to foreign markets.<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

Among the group of socialist countries, the Yugoslav and, with it, the Slovenian communist agricultural experience was different. Even though other socialist countries also allowed private farming in the form of small plots of land, known as homesteads, Yugoslavia was the only one that deviated from collectivization. In the second half of the 1960s, Yugoslavia and Slovenia, in the context of economic and social liberalization and recognizing the importance of private farming for food security, moved away from an agricultural policy that had gradually suffocated peasants and private agricultural production through economic, political, and social discrimination. They began to revive and invest in the development of private agriculture, allowing small private initiatives with the sale of surplus produce to end consumers.

However, the concept of a more peasant-friendly agricultural policy was only introduced when the rural population represented only a fifth of the total population. Despite its pragmatism, the Yugoslav model of agricultural policy remained captive to ideological prejudices. Only in the transitional period at the end of the 1980s did the agrarian maximum increase. Still, even then, with 30 hectares of arable land, except in mountainous and hilly areas where this limit was not imposed, it remained within the boundaries that prevented the expansion of capitalist relations.

---

105 Lazarević, "Uvod," 20.

106 Swain and Varga, "Introduction," 314.

107 Lazarević, "Uvod," 21.

## Acknowledgements

This article was written within the framework of the research programme Economic, Social, and Environmental History of Slovenia (P6-0280), funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

## Sources

*Internal material of the Cooperative Union of Slovenia:*

Čeferin, Emil. Zadružništvo po osvoboditvi do formiranja splošne kmetijske zadruga (1948) [Cooperatives after World War II until the Establishment of the General Agricultural Cooperative (1948)].

Čeferin, Emil. Organizacija kmetijstva in kmetijskega zadružništva v Sloveniji po osvoboditvi in do konca l. 1959 [The Structuring of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperativism in Slovenia from the Liberation in 1945 to the End of 1959].

Čeferin, Emil. Pregled zadružnega prava, zlasti o kmetijskih zadrugah, v sto letih na slovenskem ozemlju [One Hundred Years of Cooperative Law in Slovenian Territory, with Special Emphasis on Agricultural Cooperatives]. *Zbornik Biotehniške fakultete Univerze v Ljubljani, zvezek 24* (1975): 37–62.

Čeferin, Emil. Poslovne zveze zadrug in podobne organizacije, 1988 [Business Networks of Cooperatives and Related Organizations, 1988], 1–3.

Čeferin, Emil and Franci Avsec. *Zadružništvo pri nas in v nekaterih evropskih državah* [A Comparative Overview of Cooperatives in Slovenia and Selected European Countries]. Ljubljana: Zadružna zveza Slovenije: Uradni list Republike Slovenije, 1990.

Kmetijsko zadružništvo v Sloveniji ob koncu leta 1952 [Agricultural Cooperatives in Slovenia at the End of 1952].

Pregled predpisov in razvoja kmetijskega zadružništva v Sloveniji od 1945 do 1989 [An Overview of Legislation and Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in Slovenia from 1945 to 1989], 1–42.

XV. Redni občni zbor. *Letno poročilo 1986* [XV. Regular General Meeting. Annual Report 1986].

*Splošni zakon o zadrugah* [General Cooperative Act]. *Uradni list FLRJ* 59/1946 [Official Gazette of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) 59/1946].

*Ustava federativne ljudske republike Jugoslavije* [Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia]. *Uradni list FLRJ* 10/1946 [Official Gazette of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) 10/1946].

*Uradni list FLRJ*, 49–411., 9. 6. 1949 [Official Gazette of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY), 49–411., 9. 6. 1949].

*Uradni list SRS*, št. 32-2. X. 1989 [Official Gazette of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (SRS)], no. 32-2. X. 1989.

## Literature

- Allcock, John B. *The collectivization of Yugoslav agriculture and the myth of peasant resistance*. Bradford, West Yorkshire: Postgraduate School of Yugoslav Studies, University of Bradford, 1981.
- “Andrej Petelin, Predsednik Zadružne zveze Slovenije v obdobju 1972–1980” [Andrej Petelin, President of the Cooperative Union of Slovenia (1972–1980)]. In *125 let zadružništva na Slovenskem. Zadružna zveza Slovenije: ob 25-letnici ponovne ustanovitve* [125 Years of Cooperative Tradition in Slovenia. Cooperative Union of Slovenia: On the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Its Reestablishment]. Ljubljana: Zadružna zveza Slovenije, 1997.
- Avsec, Franci. “Kmetijsko zadružništvo na Slovenskem” [Agricultural Cooperatives in Slovenia]. In *Kmetijsko zadružništvo* [Agricultural Cooperatives]. 1–10. Ljubljana: ZZZS, 1998.
- Avsec, Franci. “Zadruga na Slovenskem: kratak zgodovinski oris” [Cooperatives in Slovenia: A Brief Historical Overview]. *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 46, no. 271, (2018): 104–16.
- Avsec, Franci. “Razvoj zadružnega prava na Slovenskem” [The Development of Cooperative Law in Slovenia]. In *Zadružništvo na Slovenskem. Med preteklostjo in izzivi sedanjosti* [Cooperatives in Slovenia: Between the Past and the Challenges of the Present], 11–41. Ljutomer, 2023.
- Čepič, Zdenko. “Kmetje in zadružništvo v pogledih Edvarda Kardelja” [Peasants and Cooperatives in the Views of Edvard Kardelj]. In *Čarnijev zbornik mednarodnih družboslovnih in humanističnih razprav* [A Festschrift for Ludvik Čarni, studies in social and humanities sciences], edited by Alojz Cindrič, 325–36. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 1998.
- Čepič, Zdenko. “Kmetijska politika in kmetijstvo” [Agricultural Policy and Agriculture]. In *Slovenska novejša zgodovina: od programa Zedinjena Slovenija do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije: 1848–1992* [Modern Slovenian History: From the United Slovenia Program to the International Recognition of the Republic of Slovenia, 1848–1992], 889–93. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2005.
- Čepič, Zdenko. “Preskrba prebivalstva in obvezni odkupi” [Supply of the Population and Mandatory Purchases]. In *Slovenska novejša zgodovina: od programa Zedinjena Slovenija do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije: 1848–1992* [Modern Slovenian History: From the United Slovenia Program to the Inter-

- national Recognition of the Republic of Slovenia, 1848–1992], 893–900. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2005.
- Čepič, Zdenko. “Oris pojavnih oblik kmetijske politike v letih 1945–1960” [Outline of the Manifestations of Agricultural Policy in the Years 1945–1960]. In *Preteklost sodobnosti: izbrana poglavja slovenske novejše zgodovine* [The Past of Modernity: Selected Topics in Contemporary Slovenian History], 175–188. Pijava Gorica: Aristoteles Žlahtič; Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 1999.
- Čepič, Zdenko. “Spor z informbirojem in jugoslovanska kmetijska politika” [The Informbiro Dispute and Yugoslav Agricultural Policy]. In *Jugoslavija v hladni vojni: [zbornik z Znanstvenega posveta Jugoslavija v hladni vojni, Ljubljana, 8.–9. maja 2000]* [Yugoslavia in the Cold War: The Collection of Papers at the Scientific Conference Yugoslavia in the Cold War, Ljubljana, 8–9 May 2000], 319–38, 339–60.
- Čepič, Zdenko. “Kaj, kako, zakaj? Oris odnosa države do kmetijstva in kmetov v zgodnjem jugoslovanskem socializmu, 1945–1953 (poudarek na Sloveniji)” [What, How, Why? An Outline of the State’s Relationship to Agriculture and Peasants in Early Yugoslav Socialism, 1945–1953 (Focus on Slovenia)]. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino, Zbornik Andreja Studna* 64, no. 1 (2024): 575–91. <https://doi.org/10.51663/pnz.64.1.33>
- Hofler, Richard A., and James E. Payne. “Efficiency in Social Versus Private Agricultural Production: The Case of Yugoslavia.” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 75, no. 1 (1993): 153–57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2109640>
- Kardelj, Edvard. *Problemi socialistične politike na vasi* [Problems of Socialist Policy in the Countryside]. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba: Glavna zadružna zveza Slovenije, 1959.
- Lazarevič, Žarko. *Delo in zemlja, male študije kmečkega sveta* [Labor and Land: Brief Studies of Rural Life]. Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2022.
- Lazarevič, Žarko, Marta Rendla, and Janja Sedlaček. *Zgodovina zadružništva v Sloveniji: (1856–1992)* [The History of Cooperatives in Slovenia (1856–1992)]. Ljubljana: Zadružna zveza Slovenije, 2023.
- Lazarevič, Žarko. “Uvod: Socialistično kmetijstvo med ideologijo in pragmatizmom” [Introduction: Socialist Agriculture between Ideology and Pragmatism]. In *Pol kmet, pol proletarec: integrirana kmečka ekonomija v socialistični Sloveniji, 1945–1991* [Half Farmer, Half Proletarian: The Integrated Peasant Economy in Socialist Slovenia, 1945–1991], 11–23. Koper: Založba Univerze na Primorskem, 2023.
- Lončarevič, Ivan. “Prices and Private Agriculture in Yugoslavia.” *Soviet Studies* 39, no. 4 (1987): 628–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668138708411723>
- Kovačič, Matija. “Kmetijstvo v razvoju podeželja” [Agriculture in Rural Development]. In *Prihodnost slovenskega podeželja: prostor, prebivalci, gospodarske*

- dejavnosti* [The Future of Slovenian Rural Areas: Space, Population, and Economic Activities], 163–83. Novo mesto: Tiskarna Novo mesto, Dolenjska založba, 1991.
- Kmetijsko združništvo na Slovenskem* [Agricultural Cooperatives in Slovenia]. Ljubljana: Kmečki glas, 1983.
- Makarovič, Marija. “Družine z vitalnih in odmirajočih kmetij v luči nekaterih odnosov” [Families from Thriving and Declining Farms in the Light of Certain Relationships]. In *Prihodnost slovenskega podeželja: prostor, prebivalci, gospodarske dejavnosti* [The Future of Slovenian Rural Areas: Space, Population, and Economic Activities]. Novo mesto: Tiskarna Novo mesto, Dolenjska založba, 1991.
- Malačič, Janez. “Razvoj prebivalstva Slovenije v povojnem obdobju” [Demographic Development of Slovenia in the Post-War Era]. *Teorija in praksa* 22, nos 4–5 (1985): 402–14.
- Merl, Stephan. “Sovietization in the Economy and Agriculture.” In *European History Online (EGO)*, published by the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2021-12-14. <https://www.ieg-ego.eu/merls-2011-en> (Accessed: 26 August 2025)
- Nishimizu, Mieko, and John M. Page. “Total Factor Productivity Growth, Technological Progress and Technical Efficiency Change: Dimensions of Productivity Change in Yugoslavia, 1965–78.” *The Economic Journal* 92, no. 368 (1982): 920–36. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2232675>
- Partlič, Slava. “»Znanost« v agrarni politiki Jugoslavije” [‘Science’ in the Agrarian Policy of Yugoslavia]. *Teorija in praksa* 26, nos 3–4 (1989): 428–34.
- Prinčič, Jože. “Podržavljenje zasebnega premoženja v Sloveniji po drugi svetovni vojni” [Nationalization of Private Property in Slovenia after World War II]. In *Prevrati in slovensko gospodarstvo v XX. stoletju: 1918–1945–1991* [Upheavals and the Slovenian Economy in the Twentieth Century: 1918–1945–1991], edited by Neven Borak and Žarko Lazarevič, 121–43. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1996.
- Stipetić, Vladimir, and Štefan Bojnec. “Proizvodna funkcija jugoslovenske poljoprivrede i izvodi za dugoročnu politiku poljoprivrednog razvoja” [The Production Function of Yugoslav Agriculture and Implications for Long-Term Agricultural Development Policy]. *Cecos* 2 (1985).
- Swain, Nigel. “Eastern European Collectivisation Campaigns Compared, 1945–1962.” In *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and Entanglements*, edited by Arnd Bauerkämper, Constantin Iordachi, 497–534. Budapest: CEU Press, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789633860489-017>
- Swain, Nigel. *Collective Farms which Work?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511522017>

- Swain, Nigel, and Zsuzsanna Varga. "Introduction." *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 30, no. 3 (2022): 307–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2022.2133439>
- Tochitch, Desimir. "Collectivization in Yugoslavia." *Journal of Farm Economics* 41, no. 1 (1959): 26–42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1235196>
- Veselinov, Dragan. *Agrarno pitanje u Jugoslaviji: teorijsko-empirijska analiza položaja i uloge seljačkog gazdinstva u agrarnoj politici i privrednom razvoju Jugoslavije od 1918. do 1980. Godine* [The Agrarian Question in Yugoslavia: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of the Position and Role of the Peasant Farm in Agrarian Policy and Economic Development from 1918 to 1980]. Beograd: Borba, 1981.
- Veselinov, Dragan. *Sumarak seljaštva* [The Twilight of the Peasantry]. Beograd: Ekonomika, 1987.

