

Bogoslav Dobrin, *Bulgarian Economic Development Since World War II*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1973, pp. 185.

This is a distressingly bad book. The distress derives from the risk that Dobrin's book, in the absence of any other recent studies in English concentrating on postwar Bulgarian economic development, will be accepted by Western readers as the best available source of information on the subject. Hence my unpleasant duty to warn the reader against the book's shoddy scholarship and pre-conceived conclusions. Many more examples could be cited than this space permits. In forming these carelessly-argued conclusions is the author's obvious bias against crediting Bulgaria's Communist government with any positive accomplishments.

Dobrin's central thesis is that despite the admittedly impressive growth rates of Bulgarian industry, inefficient over-investment in heavy industry and the poor performance of the agricultural sector have kept the Bulgarian standard of living the lowest in Eastern Europe. Evidence of inefficient industrial investment is confined, however, to unfootnoted, gossipy stories of individual scandals (including several about the Kremikovtsi steel complex distinguished by four different transliterations of its Bulgarian spelling, all of them wrong) and to the findings of «the American economist, M. Ernst» (p. 156), neither footnoted nor listed in the bibliography nor known to this reviewer, that as late as 1967 Bulgaria still had the lowest level of per capita industrial production in Eastern Europe. The author's conclusions about Bulgarian agricultural performance rest entirely on the study assembled with his help by Gregor Lazarcik for the Joint Economic Committee of the U. S. Congress in 1970. This survey of national income for the Eastern European countries includes calculations of net agricultural output. The deductions from gross output of operating expenses, specially defined, and depreciation, always difficult to calculate, pull Bulgaria from the top to the bottom of the list. Poland and Yugoslavia are left at the top. We would need to know just how these calculations were made, preferably in a methodological appendix, in order to reject the suspicion that they reflect nothing more than the far larger farm size and degree of mechanization in the Bulgarian countryside. To hold up Yugoslavia's small, under-capitalized albeit private peasant holdings as a model of efficiency to which Bulgaria should aspire requires more evidence than a single statistical table listing unexplained calculations.

In any case, Dobrin calls into question his credibility as an economist reasoning objectively from statistical evidence by a number of unsupported and doubtful assertions that deny even honest intentions to the Bulgarian Communist Party. Concerning agriculture, the government is alleged to have undertaken collectivization cynically, «for political security, to make the population economically dependent on the state» (p.171). Nor are we reassured by the failure of the author's skimpy bibliography to include more than one book and two journal articles published by a Bulgarian scholar. The bulk of his own sources are in fact those of the journalist, not the scholar.

As a result, Dobrin leaves the discerning reader with no reliable indication of what real difficulties have accompanied the Bulgarian experience with central planning. The author's charges of systematic misallocation of industrial investments are probably true, in spite of his unconvincing evidence. The reforms of the mid-1960's have not in fact made many important changes in existing practice. But we must look elsewhere for a scholarly balancing of economic success and failure in postwar Bulgaria, perhaps to the work in progress by George Feiwel.

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