

The aim of establishing a regime of modernity in the less developed East European countries based previously on agrarian economy was one of the crucial goals which communist decision makers tried to reach with the help of experts. This agenda was symbolized by the omnipresent slogan “to catch and overtake the West”. The authors on diverse case-studies reconstruct how politicians, engineers and artists tried to appropriate the experience from the West in shaping the socialist modern order and avoiding mistakes which in the opinion of policy makers and experts caused Western Europe and the United States to become an example of failed modernity.

On the other hand, the authors also show how inhabitants of the socialist bloc tried to “catch up with the West” on their own, for instance by permanent or temporary emigration (see Paulina Bren’s chapter on the Czechoslovak Normalization). Another opportunity of catching the West, if emigration was not possible due to political constraints, consisted in watching or collecting material artifacts from beyond the Iron Curtain. For instance, one could visit the American Exhibition in Moscow to see the “Miracle Kitchen” or simply proudly present empty Western perfume or alcohol bottles in the most exposed place in a flat.

The authors also discuss critical approaches toward the West. For instance, Barbara Walker (chapter 11) reconstructs the ambiguity of approach of dissidents in the Soviet Union towards Western journalists. In samizdat publications quoted in the volume one can also find criticism of the Western cultural wasteland symbolized by discothèques and the fashionable Adidas clothing brand (p. 190).

The ten articles collected here provide an attractive perspective of the research in the field of contemporary social and cultural history of Eastern Europe. Actually, this is one of the most important volumes on the cultural history of state socialism that I have ever read. This book is a must read for scholars interested in the history of Eastern Europe in the XX century. In the footnotes one can also find an extensive up to date bibliography on the historiography of Eastern Europe as well as the concept of modernity. However, the articles gathered in this volume are written by scholars from diverse academic fields. They also cover different epochs. Most of the contributions deal with the postwar history, however, the first two chapters concern the end of the XIX century and the interwar period. It is difficult to imagine a single reader who will be able to read carefully the whole volume due to the heterogeneous academic approaches as well as time periods. Besides, what struck me is the fact that aside from P. all contributors are Westerners. I hope that one day I will get my hands on a similarly excellent volume on Eastern European social and cultural history with a substantial number of contributions written by scholars from this region.

Wassenaar

Patryk Wasiak

Von den Restgütern zu den Sowchosen in Estland 1939-1953. Dokumentensammlung. Hrsg. von David Feest unter Mitarbeit von Karsten Brüggemann. (Schriften der Baltischen Historischen Kommission, Bd. 15.) LIT Verlag. Münster u.a. 2010. 234 S. ISBN 978-3-643-10717-6. (€ 24,90.)

This carefully edited and very useful document collection deals with one of the forms of collective agriculture – *sovkhoses* (state farms) – introduced into the Estonian SSR during the post-World War II years. In an informative introduction, the editors correctly point out that this variant of collective agricultural organization has received far less research attention than its companion, the *kolkhozes* (collective farms), in part because the *sovkhoses* (at least in Estonia) were not numerous, only some 127 by 1950 (p. 27), and in the aggregate involved less agricultural land.

The *sovkhoses*, however, did have a special role in the thinking of those who were “building socialism”: they were meant to be model farms – “pure state enterprises” say the editors (p. 13), showpieces of a superior form of agricultural organization and production, financed and organized by the state, with skilled managers and a talented labor force iden-

tified, recruited, and appointed by the Party and the government. These allegedly innovative, progressive, and above all socialistic collective enterprises supposedly were to stand in sharp contrast to the individualized, exploitative, and regressive modes of agricultural production – the isolated farmsteads (*Einzelbauernhöfe*) – characteristic of the interwar period of “bourgeois capitalism” (doc. 36). Yet as the documents attest repeatedly, by the end of the researched period only a few of the *sovkhozes* could be considered successes (doc. 51), an evaluation delivered by the internal assessments by both Party leaders and agricultural ministers. The *sovkhozes* therefore do have a separate and distinct history, which includes for some of them a link – partially territorial and partially toponymic – to those fragments of Baltic German-owned estates (*Restgütern*) that had survived the Estonian land reforms of 1919-1920 (doc. 1).

One striking feature of these primary sources – which in many cases are quite blunt and clear-headed about the numerous shortcoming of the *sovkhozes* – is the contrast they provide with the resounding sloganeering by Party leaders in public media (not included in the present collection) concerning the self-evident (but future) superiority of collective agriculture. In the present there was lack of progress (in socialist terms) which had numerous sources. How to arrange them in order of importance clearly remains a significant problem of further historical research. Perhaps it was the whole idea of “planning,” especially the five-year plans, that are referred to endlessly in these official documents but never criticized, since planning came “from above” and the most important and sacrosanct plans originated in Moscow (see docs. 31, 32, 35, 36, 52). The bureaucracy in charge of running the *sovkhozes* was itself unstable, presumably as a result of the belief that farming problems in the hinterlands could be resolved by renaming and reshuffling supervisory offices at the center (e.g. docs. 2, 29, 65, 62, 67). The bureaucrats continued to issue orders to local leaders, evidently assuming that the problems lay in how the “plan” was implemented rather than with the “plan” itself and that charging a long vertical chain of officials with “responsibilities” (*Verpflichtungen*) that were really veiled threats would by itself guarantee satisfactory on-the-ground results. In some cases, local leaders acted outside the regulations (doc. 47); many were ignorant of the rhythms of the agricultural year; and occasionally there were language problems within the *sovkhoz* cadres, as more monolingual Russian-speakers entered the picture and had to work with or supervise Estonians who spoke no Russian (doc. 57). The problem of keeping “cadres” on the *sovkhozes* was never resolved during the whole period: specialists came and went, as did lesser laborers, with their frequent turnover being at least in part caused by perpetually inferior living conditions (doc. 60).

One result of all these interacting variables was that the very last document in the collection (doc. 68, October 1953), issued by the Council of Ministers of the Estonian SSR still complains about the shortfalls in *sovkhozes* of meat and milk production and predictably continues to issue yet more *Verpflichtungen* to a chain of officials. These problems did not end in 1953, as the subsequent history of Estonian agriculture clearly shows, but the reviewed collection is clearly a welcome step toward the writing of the full story.

Ames, IA

Andrejs Plakans

Siegfried Hanke, Rainer Vogel: Urbare des Fürstentums Jägerndorf aus der Zeit der Markgrafen von Brandenburg-Ansbach (1531-1535-1554/78). (Erträge Böhmischo-mährischer Forschungen, Bd. 8.) LIT Verlag. Münster u.a. 2010. 469 S., 8 s/w-Abb. ISBN 978-3-643-10845-6. (€ 49,90.)

Die Bearbeiter dieser Transkription und Auswertung der Urbare des Fürstentums Jägerndorf haben über die eigene Familienforschung zu ihrem Thema gefunden. Es ist durchaus bezeichnend für die Entwicklung der letzten Jahre, dass Familienforschung nicht nur als Hobby sehr beliebt ist, sondern auch die Familienforscher dadurch zur Regionalforschung übergehen und der Wissenschaft wertvolle Arbeitsmittel und Erkenntnisse zur