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Background Report  
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REASONING BEHIND NEW AGRICULTURAL LAW IN YUGOSLAVIA

MUNICH, October 22 (Stankovic) -- The Yugoslav government last week introduced new measures aimed at raising the agricultural technical level of the countryside and at the same time increasing the cooperation between private peasants and agricultural collectives.

As indicated above the new measures have the well known dual nature characteristic for all Communist regimes: the increase of production while at the same time the so-called "socialist" forms are encouraged. Thus, the new measures may be looked upon with suspicion by the Yugoslav peasants.

The regulations in question are embodied in a law called "The Law Providing for Rational Utilization of Farmland", passed on October 15 by the Yugoslav National Assembly in Belgrade. According to a member of the Federal Executive Council in charge of agriculture, Slavko Komar, the new law would not "in any way limit the rights of individual ownership of land".

However, the Law (as published in "Borba" of October 17) does contain measures which would allow the regime to confiscate the land of peasants for a period of one to five years if they refuse to implement various technical and land-reclamation measures prescribed by the regime. The latter aspect is a innovation in the Yugoslav agricultural policy. Elsewhere it is stated that the aim of the Law is to promote the so-called "socialist cooperation" between the private peasants and collective farms.

But since there<sup>are</sup> only 390 so-called Peasants' Working Cooperatives in Yugoslavia, it is difficult to visualize how about 85 per cent of all peasants in Yugoslavia could conclude "socialist cooperation" with so few collectives. On the other hand the regime, as indicated by the Law, is apparently prepared to introduce mechanical and technical improvements on the confiscated land and to return it to the peasants at the end of the prescribed period. It would appear even though that land were confiscated for a certain period, that the private peasants would be chief beneficiaries of these measures. On this point, however, the Law is definitely unclear.

### To Remove Backwardness

The measures would probably affect the most backward areas rather than such an area as Voivodina (the granary of Yugoslavia) where farmers themselves, on their own initiative, are interested in modernizing technical process. In this respect the possibility cannot be ruled out that the new scheme of the regime will encounter some measure of peasant resistance.

As regards machinery, some of the most prosperous private farmers in Yugoslavia would like to own machinery individually. But as long as the regime pursues the policy of subvention as regards the renting machinery to the private peasants, the majority of them would probably not be willing to undertake the expenses of purchasing a full complement of agricultural machinery.

The Yugoslav weekly "Ekonomska politika" of June 13 of this year said that "individual peasants are forbidden to purchase big agricultural machines (tractors and similar machinery)" because these machinery are not rationally used even at the biggest state farms while in the hands of individual peasants they would be used only for making money by leasing them to other peasants. Furthermore, the individual peasants in Yugoslavia, according to "Ekonomska politika", "are forbidden to hire workers to work on their land". Also credits are primarily given to the peasants coming into cooperation with collective farms.

### Excerpts from New Law

Following are the most important excerpts from the new law dealing with the utilization of farmland:

1. "All agricultural land (fields, gardens, vineyards meadows, and reeds), regardless in whose possession they are, must in the future be used for the agricultural production".

2. An individual peasant "must use all agro-technical and land-reclamation measures prescribed for the area in which his land is situated...If an individual peasant is not able to secure the application of measures prescribed by municipal or district people's committees, the Law provides that he may conclude contracts with an agricultural organization securing him the application of these measures".

3. If an individual peasant is not able to conclude a contract with a collective farm "a commission of arbitration" must be formed to bring about the conclusion of the contract. This "commission of arbitration is composed of an official of the people's committee (as the chairman of the commission) and of representatives of the conflicting parties. If the individual peasants or the agricultural organization have not appointed their representatives for the commission, the third member of the commission is then appointed by the people's committee." The decision of the commission of arbitration is compulsory for



both parties although they are allowed to complain against it with higher authorities.

4. If an individual peasant "without justified reasons" is not willing to till any part of his land" the Law foresees that the untilled land can be forcibly confiscated for the period from one to five years".

5. The same "forcible confiscation" of land can be introduced if an individual peasant is not able "to secure the application of the prescribed agro-technical and land-reclamation measures, or if he does not use his land in accordance with the general plan of the use of land..."

6. Such an individual peasant will be first warned and called upon to employ modern methods "within a limited time". "Against this decision it is impossible to complain" and if an individual peasant has not complied with the given term "people's committee would propose a decision aimed at confiscating land forcibly".

7. The forcibly confiscated land can be given to any agricultural organization (or even to another private peasant) for farming, but they are not allowed to lease it to any other organization or private peasant. Private peasants can be given such land only if it remains within the allowed limit of 10 hectares. (I.e. if a private peasant possesses already 10 hectares, he is not allowed to lease more land.)

8. The money agricultural cooperatives or individual peasants pay for renting confiscated land "goes to the municipal investment fund and is to be used for the advancing of agriculture". Nowhere in the new land can one see any provision providing for compensation to be given to the original owner of the land from whom the land was confiscated! It is, however, foreseen that if such a peasant changes his mind and agrees to till his land by using modern machinery, the decision of the forcible confiscation can be annulled. However, such a peasant must guarantee the authorities that he really is willing and capable of tilling his land in a modern way. For this purpose he must pay "earnest money" which he would get back if his obligations are fulfilled, and which he would lose if he has failed to fulfill his obligations. (The Law provides that the decision of the forcible confiscation can be annulled only if the party which has taken land for its use has agreed to this annulment.)

#### Peasants' Resistance?

In his speech on October 15 Slavko Komar said that he hopes that "every problem would be solved through free contracts between individual peasants and collective farms". In other words, Komar believes that individual farmers will be compelled to enter socialist cooperation with collective farms in order to

avoid forcible confiscation of their land. And since the individual farmers who this year entered "socialist cooperation" with collective farms produced much more wheat and maize than independent individual peasants, the Yugoslav authorities believe that this fact would persuade private farmers to collaborate freely.

According to Eric Bourne, the Belgrade correspondent of the "Christian Science Monitor" (issue of October 16), the Yugoslav leaders "anticipate some resistance to the new measure, partly from ultra-conservative peasants still opposed to any form of state intervention in farming and partly from others who hold that its provisions are part of a back door return to collectivization".

#### Some Data

According to data of the Main Cooperative Federation of Yugoslavia published by Tanjug on October 16, there are in Yugoslavia at present 390 Peasants' Working Cooperatives. In these cooperatives the peasants associate as producers, contributing their own land and equipment to the cooperatives. Work in such cooperatives is done collectively. Wages are proportional to the work done. In some PWCs the owners of land and equipment vested in the cooperatives receive rents. In all of them each household retains a small piece of land of fixed area around the dwelling-house for private cultivation.

In 1957 there were in Yugoslavia 578 Peasants' Working Cooperatives with 313,000 ha of land, while now there are 390 PWC with only 207,000 ha of land of which only 160,000 ha were arable. According to the present data "last year the PWC bought 3,500 hectares of arable land from private farmers". As for the decrease of the number of PWC the data published by Tanjug said: "The number of PWC has fallen compared with 1957 because some of them merged with large farms and General Agricultural Cooperatives (a kind of purchasing-selling cooperatives in which peasants work their own privately-owned land). Merging of land was also undertaken among PWCs themselves, especially where there were more of these cooperatives in one place". According to Slavko Komar in Yugoslavia there are now 5,620 General Agricultural Cooperatives while in 1957 there were 5,851 GACs with 181,000 ha of land. Also according to the 1957 data, out of a total agricultural land fund of 12.1 million hectares, 10.9 million hectares belonged to the private sector.

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