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# *D i l e m e*

*Razprave o vprašanjih sodobne slovenske zgodovine*

# *Dileme*

*Razprave o vprašanjih sodobne slovenske zgodovine*

## *Dilemmas*

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Naslov uredništva

Tivolska 42, 1000 Ljubljana

Odgovorni urednik

dr. Tomaž Ivešić (Slovenija)

Glavni urednik

dr. Renato Podbersič (Slovenija)

Tehnični urednik

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Petar Grubišić<sup>1</sup>

*Agrarian Reform and Colonization  
as the Foundations for the  
Legitimate Rule of the Yugoslav  
Socialist Government: The Gateway  
towards Collectivization in Slavonia  
and Vojvodina*

*Abstract*

*This paper analyses the agrarian reform and colonization in Slavonia and Vojvodina from 1945 to 1948. This process can be viewed as the culmination of the processes of land redistribution which started in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. However, land redistribution and colonization after World War II took place in vastly different circumstances, not only due to the new political system, but also due to the forceful expulsion of the*

<sup>1</sup> Petar Grubišić, PhD student, University of Ghent, Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Department of Languages and Cultures, petar.grubisic@ugent.be.

*German-speaking population in those areas. Although colonization was initially viewed as a long-term project, it had concluded up by the beginning of 1948. The paper analyzes the colonization and land redistribution from the perspective of colonists from Dalmatia who were settled in Slavonia and Vojvodina. Based on archival sources and existing scholarly works on this topic, it analyzes the reasons for the relocation of certain groups, the methods that were used in the redistribution of land, and how it permanently changed society in the region.*

KEY WORDS: Yugoslavia after World War II, agrarian reform, colonization, collectivization, land consolidation

### *Izvleček*

*Prispevek analizira agrarno reformo in kolonizacijo v Slavoniji in Vojvodini od leta 1945 do 1948. Ta proces lahko razumemo kot vrhunec procesov prerazporeditve zemljišč, ki so se začeli v Kraljevini Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev. Vendar sta se prerazporeditev zemljišč in kolonizacija po drugi svetovni vojni zgodili v zelo drugačnih okoliščinah, ne le zaradi novega političnega sistema, ampak tudi zaradi nasilnega izгона nemško govorečega prebivalstva s teh območij. Čeprav je bila kolonizacija sprva obravnavana kot dolgoročen projekt, se je zaključila v začetku leta 1948. Prispevek analizira kolonizacijo in prerazporeditev zemljišč z vidika kolonistov iz Dalmacije, ki so se naselili v Slavoniji in Vojvodini. Na podlagi arhivskih virov in obstoječih znanstvenih del na to temo prispevek analizira razloge za premestitev določenih skupin, metode, ki so bile uporabljene pri prerazporeditvi zemlje, in kako je to trajno spremenilo družbo v regiji.*

KLJUČNE BESEDE: *Jugoslavija po drugi svetovni vojni, agrarna reforma, kolonizacija, kolektivizacija, komasacija*

### *Introduction*

Josip Sladoljev was one of the many participants in colonization efforts made by the Yugoslav Socialist government. In 1947, he moved from his birthplace of Vodice in Dalmatia and settled in Slavonia, in the village of Kapinci. His stay there was not permanent, and he officially decided to return to Vodice in 1955. However, during his period of absence a drastic change occurred in land ownership relations. Upon his departure, his land was split between his sibling, who did not join the colonization, and the state. The latter part of the property was added to the state agrarian fund, which redistributed that land to the local peasant work cooperative. During that period, the cooperative built an agricultural building, while the local government traded another part of the land to another peasant. This was done as compensation for the school that was built on his property. All of these changes to the landscape caused an issue when Sladoljev decided to apply for the return of his former property. Although he was entitled to it, because he had renounced the property that was given to him in Slavonia, the new circumstances complicated the situation. After a year of administrative hurdles, he agreed to either land or monetary compensation.<sup>2</sup>

This is one of the numerous examples of colonist returnees who moved back from previous properties in either Slavonia or Vojvodina to their old fields and faced a drastically changed

2 Državni arhiv u Šibeniku, HR-DAŠI 29, Narodni odbor kotara Šibenik, kut. 29.

situation. The reasons for their return were environmental, societal, or political. All of them are addressed here, but particular emphasis is placed on the government policies, especially on the question of collectivization that took place from 1948 till 1953. The goal is to present how colonization was used as a foundation for gradually introducing socialism in the countryside. It shows the subtle ways the government used to coerce people to accept cooperatives during the initial stages of colonization. It also explains the sudden change in policies and inconsistencies in its implementation.

### *Background to the Agrarian Reform*

Agrarian reform and colonization in Socialist Yugoslavia took place between 1945 and 1948 on both the federal and republican level. This reform had to address the issues of land ownership and quality of life in villages that were present throughout interwar Yugoslavia. Although the old had regime tried to solve that problem by targeting the remnants of feudal relations and focusing on limiting large landowners, their efforts failed due to inconsistency. Additionally, the poor conditions forced peasants to sell parts of their plot to cover their expenses, thus further fragmenting and reducing the size of their lot.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the socialist government was in an entirely different situation. It seized swaths of land during the war and was in the position to redistribute it as it saw fit. The peasantry had to be compensated for their role in the war. For peasants fighting was done in order to ensure survival and, in a sense, their version of socialism. They were satisfied if they

3 Marijan Maticka, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Hrvatskoj 1945–1948* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1990), 16.

were left alone on their small fields and did not ask for much (“caru carevo, a Bogu Božje”), and breaking the promise of privately owned land would drive a wedge between peasant and government.<sup>4</sup> The leadership agreed that peasants should own the land they were given, especially since they were poor. There were two cardinal rules: the land belongs to the people who work on it, and the land and its inventory are privately owned.<sup>5</sup>

The government used the agrarian reform as a pretext to legalize confiscations and set a maximum limit of 35 hectares for agricultural properties. Also, non-agrarian citizens could only own up to 5 hectares.<sup>6</sup> Along with those whose primary employment was not in agriculture, this category encompassed land which was leased or farmed with an external workforce. The government thought that this concession would strengthen the link between village and city and promote modernization. The other reason was securing the food source for the city population in the aftermath of the war.<sup>7</sup> All of the inventory present on the seized land was confiscated along with it. Half of the agrarian fund became state-owned, either as state farms or because it consisted of forested areas. The rest was to be given to the agrarian interests, who were local peasants, and the colonists. The latter were mainly settled in former German villages. Local agrarian interests received the land taken from

4 Ivan Cifrić, “KPJ/SKJ i seljaštvo”, *Sociologija i prostor: časopis za istraživanje prostornog i sociokulturnog razvoja* 67–68, (1980): 8.

5 Marijan Maticka, “Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj od 1945. do 1953.”, *Sociologija i prostor: časopis za istraživanje prostornog i sociokulturnog razvoja* 125–126, (1994): 193.

6 *Zakon o agrarnoj reformi i kolonizaciji* (Zagreb, 1945.), 4.

7 Maticka, “Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj”, 193–194.

churches and similar institutions and bigger land owners. Most of the distributed land became privately owned.<sup>8</sup>

Politically, the official proclamation of the Agrarian Reform and Colonization in August 1945 was unsurprising as it was tied to the looming elections that were scheduled for November. This way, the Communist government wanted to confirm its alliance with the peasants and that they were upholding the promise of fair land redistribution. In his speech, Moša Pijade stated that peasants had been tricked too many times and that this regulation would bring the land back into the hands of the people who would work on it. He added that partisan fighters were entitled to land not as a reward but as compensation for their service and suffering.<sup>9</sup> This favouritism towards partisan fighters and sympathizers had a clear purpose. Since they already had ties with the new government, settling them with their families would make them a valuable backbone for the Party in the regions where their influence was low. Additionally, that type of colonist, at least from the perspective of the Party, would be more open to changes in the villages and new policies.<sup>10</sup> Still, the Party had to be careful with their policies when dealing with the countryside. Otherwise, they would risk alienating the peasants and thus compromising the legitimacy of their rule. The question of the correct way caused polemics within the Party. Sociologist Vojin Radomirović stated that the Party swung constantly between two currents when approaching the situation in the countryside. The first was dogmatism, which was robust and did not want to bend to the situation in the field. On the other side, he positioned pragmatism. Due to its liberal character, it had to be carefully implemented, and it did

8 Ibid., 196.

9 *Zakon o agrarnoj reformi i kolonizaciji* (Zagreb 1945.), 13–15.

10 Hrvatski državni arhiv, HR-HDA 1167, Ministarstvo poljoprivrede NRH, Odsjek za agrarnu reformu i kolonizaciju (1945–1949), kut. 7.

not use forceful means. Radomirović pointed out that the goal of the pragmatic approach was to make a compromise between theory and the situation in the field.<sup>11</sup>

The economic reasons behind the colonization of Slavonia and Vojvodina were twofold. It was meant for the people of the poor rural areas of Yugoslavia, who struggled to sustain themselves due to overpopulation and lack of fertile land.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the forceful exodus of people of German ethnicity left entire villages abandoned, along with their fields. In order to kickstart the economy, the government needed a workforce. The impoverished areas of Yugoslavia had a population that could supplement that need. So, the goal of colonization was to solve two problems: economic strife at the point of origin and the lack of workforce at the destination.<sup>13</sup> An average applicant for colonization could receive between 8 or 12 cadastral acres, but some groups (war heroes, army officers, large families) were privy to up to 30% more land. Non-agrarian applicants usually received around 3 acres of land.<sup>14</sup> The Party could assess the composition of potential colonists through the applications. Amongst the information such as status in the army, marital relations and land ownership, the potential colonist had to state his vocation. Most of them declared themselves peasants, but there were also cases of fishermen, miners, lumberjacks, etc.<sup>15</sup> The Party could then use the gathered information in a way that would maximize the abilities of the individual. As an

11 Vojin Radomirović, "Politika kao komponenta transformacije našeg sela", *Sociologija i prostor: časopis za istraživanje prostornog i sociokulturnog razvoja* 34, (1971): 13.

12 Ibid., 8.

13 Marijan Matićka, "Kolonizacija u Hrvatskoj 1945–1948. godine", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 19, no. 2 (1987): 27–53.

14 Ibid., 7.

15 HR-HDA 1167, kut. 30–34.

example, if the applicant had a vocation as a baker, the local government would search for land with a building that would allow him to continue his trade.<sup>16</sup>

### *Colonization Efforts*

The encouragement for migration was undertaken by the village's former partisan fighters who had joined the Party. These Party representatives were in charge of collecting the applications and had to dispel fears that troubled the peasants. The potential colonists feared leaving the area of their ancestors. They were also concerned that the promise of ownership was false and that the state would not relinquish its stake in the land.<sup>17</sup> These fears were somewhat justified because even though their land could be given to their relatives, if they did join the colonization, everything above the allowed limit would become a part of the agrarian fund. If a potential colonist did not have any siblings, the entire property was transferred to the state. Some colonists tried to circumvent this by leaving a family member behind under the pretences of poor health.<sup>18</sup> This practice displeased the regional institutions: they had sent officials to compile the reports on the abandoned properties, and even the movable inventory was officially state-owned. Meanwhile, the aforementioned Party representative would travel with colonists to the destination and would later take a prominent role in the new settlement.<sup>19</sup> Additional propaganda for the move was present at the gathering centres in the form

16 Ibid.

17 Božo Rudež, *Veljko Bulajić: Vlakom bez voznog reda u povijest filma* (Čakovec: Zrinski, 2015), 23.

18 Državni arhiv u Splitu, HR-DAST 21, kut. 3.

19 Ibid., kut. 27.



of speeches, plays, music, free food and clothes. Illustrative depictions of these events are presented in two films, *Train Without a Timetable* (1959) and *The Promised Land* (1986), by Veljko Bulajić.<sup>20</sup>

The government assigned limited quotas for all regions that were sending potential colonists. They were divided between the federal and republican levels. The first transport from Dalmatia to Vojvodina took place in October 1945.<sup>21</sup> The colonist route usually started by boarding a boat which took them to the town of Bakar and from there they used trains to reach the larger urban areas near their new housing.<sup>22</sup> Organized transport reached its peak in the first half of 1946, after which individual migration became prevalent. The government would still provide organized moves well into 1947, but stressed each time that they would no longer organize them.<sup>23</sup> Individual migration mostly depended on openings created by repaired houses or returnees from colonization. After arriving at the train station, the colonists had to find their own way to the final destination.<sup>24</sup>

There was a clear difference between federal and republican colonization concerning the policies on that subject. The federal level covered the areas of Vojvodina, Baranja and Srijem, and did not implement strict regulations regarding the ethnic composition of villages. That was partially due to the fact that the vacant regions were settled by the initial wave of colonists and mostly consisted of partisan fighters and their families. The government tried to capitalize on their shared background and

20 Rudež, *Vlakom bez voznog reda u povijest filma*, 23; 91; 252.

21 HR-DAST 21, kut. 3.

22 Maticka, "Kolonizacija u Hrvatskoj", 35.

23 HR-DAST 21, kut. 27.

24 Maticka, "Kolonizacija u Hrvatskoj", 37.

use that to cultivate a Yugoslav identity.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the colonization in Slavonia had a cautious approach when assigning the colonist to the village to minimize the risks of ethnic tensions. This was a constant issue during interwar Yugoslavia and the Independent State of Croatia. The policies of the former in the redistribution of the land benefited veterans of the First World War, who were mostly of Serbian ethnicity.<sup>26</sup> The backlash to this came after the creation of the Croatian quisling state. It conducted harsh expulsions of Serbs in order to create an ethnically pure state.<sup>27</sup>

The government had to resolve the issue of both decolonists<sup>28</sup> and autocolonists<sup>29</sup>. All of that was dependent on free housing and unwanted people had to vacate the properties.<sup>30</sup> Decolonists were in a precarious situation. The first incentive was to immediately expel them, but it was decided that those who helped and did not have a property were allowed to relocate to former German properties. Those who had cooperated with the enemy had to fend for themselves and were either arrested or expelled. Serbian returnees had to get their land back regardless of the wishes of the current resident. Some decolonists shared houses with the returnees until housing was open for them. All who wanted to return to their place of origin had free transportation.<sup>31</sup>

25 Melisssa K. Bokvoy, *Peasants and Communists: Politics and Ideology in the Yugoslav Countryside, 1941–1953* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1998), 51.

26 Maticka, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija*, 14.

27 Ibid. 21–22.

28 Colonists settled by the Independent State of Croatia.

29 Self-inserted settlers, mostly refugees.

30 Maticka, “Kolonizacija u Hrvatskoj”, 28.

31 Ibid., 33.

The impact of the agrarian reform consolidated the land and reduced the total number of small peasant farms (up to 2 ha). Their decrease was complemented by the rise in the size of the average peasant farm (from 2 to 5 ha) and a higher total number of households. Upon their arrival, the colonists received on average 4.4 hectares.<sup>32</sup> They expected well-furnished houses and cultivated land. Their illusions were shattered when they realized that the housing was in disrepair and, if they arrived during the harvest, they could not access the fields right away. After the harvest of 1946, regardless of their previous knowledge, the colonists had to take full care of the land they were given. Some of them had to change housing a couple of times which caused annoyance. Despite the responsibility of dedicated district commissions, the free food was available only during the first ten days of settling. After that, the colonists had to fend for themselves by finding work at local state farms or with private owners. All of this caused so much disappointment in some that they returned home and later disincentivized others from partaking in colonization. The state tried to compensate by offering favourable loans for cattle, tools and building materials.<sup>33</sup>

### *Policies Towards the Countryside*

Despite the results and propaganda effort organized by the Party, a good portion of colonists were still suspicious of the new government. In the eyes of the Party, the spirit of individualism was present amongst peasants and they would not bend easily to aggressive changes in their lifestyle. The already

32 Maticka, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija* 137.

33 Maticka, "Kolonizacija u Hrvatskoj", 40.

mentioned works of Veljko Bulajić depict the colonist attitude through two prominent statements: *what's mine is mine* (“što je moje, moje je”)<sup>34</sup> and *to each his own* (“svoj na svome”)<sup>35</sup>. Both of those lines highlight the peasants’ want to own a patch of land, and any approach by the government was seen as an encroachment on his ownership. They also felt that something that was easily given could be taken away in the same fashion.

The Party was acutely aware of the peasants’ resistance to forceful change. Therefore, they implemented an approach of gradual transition in the socialization of the countryside. First, they incentivized the joining of peasants into general agricultural cooperatives. They were not very different from the family cooperatives which had existed in Yugoslavia before, so peasants had previous knowledge of them. That was one of the reasons why colonists, preferably, were moved and settled together. The Party expected that it would be easier for them to accept cooperation with siblings or their compatriots, rather than with strangers. Once the peasant was educated and had become accustomed to a new way of living, they could implement the formation of peasant worker cooperatives. This approach of gradual induction of socialism in the countryside was supplemented by state-owned farms. In the early stages of colonization, the government had not forced the issue of joining the cooperatives. The peasants were already antagonized because of the regulations regarding buyout (“otkup”) and the crackdown on those whom the state considered speculators or smugglers.<sup>36</sup>

34 *Vlak bez voznog reda*, 1959.

35 *Obećana zemlja*, 1986.

36 Bokvov, *Peasants and Communists*, 66–67.

Some colonists applied for the land as a peasant work co-operative. Initially, their number was not great and they were not supported to a great extent. Due to a lack of support from the state and local commissions, there was a lot of confusion in the everyday organization, and distribution of wealth and tools.<sup>37</sup> Despite that, the partisan settlers were more willing to join up. This was the case with village of Stanišić, where most of the colonists immediately gave their lands to the cooperatives.<sup>38</sup> Still, the number of cooperatives remained low, with around 8160 ha distributed to them during the agrarian reform.<sup>39</sup> However, from 1947 if a person wanted to participate in colonization, being part of a general agricultural cooperative became mandatory. At that point, most of the land had already been redistributed and the state wanted a guarantee that the settlers would become a part of a cooperative.<sup>40</sup> They also used other methods to force cooperation between settlers. For example, in the District of Osijek, the local government provided the cart to one colonist and the horses to two of his neighbours. That way, if they wanted to use their new assets, they had to share them and work together.<sup>41</sup> To compensate, the local institutions monitored and nurtured good relations between colonists and locals.<sup>42</sup>

37 Matica, "Kolonizacija u Hrvatskoj", 40.

38 Miljenko Beljanski, *Stanišić* (Senta, 1985), 138.

39 Matica, "Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj", 195.

40 HR-DAST 21, kut 27.

41 Državni arhiv u Osijeku, HR-DAOS 60, Okružni narodni odbor Osijek, kut. 222.

42 Matica, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija*, 134.

*Collectivization and Land Consolidation*

The change in this approach came rapidly and due to external factors. The independent and aggressive foreign policy of Yugoslavia caused friction with the Soviet Union. In addition to that, the Soviet leadership was displeased with Yugoslavia's economic policies.<sup>43</sup> The Soviets wanted Yugoslavia to focus on the extraction of raw materials and to rely on them for agricultural and industrial needs. They were displeased with Yugoslavia's choice to begin with industrialization and were critical of individual ownership in agriculture. All of it culminated in the Resolution of Cominform. Amongst the list of grievances was the incorrect ideological approach toward the countryside.<sup>44</sup> The confrontation and subsequent condemnation by Cominform caused a shift of the currents from pragmatism to dogmatism. The Yugoslav leadership had to defend its legitimacy in the eyes of its fellow communists. In order to present themselves as ideologically pure, they decided to begin the process of collectivization.<sup>45</sup> They stressed the need to strengthen socialism by spreading, organizing and supporting cooperatives and the unification of individual peasant lands into a socialist construct. Their stance was that the state and cooperative ownership with planned growth were the basis for improving production and fighting backwardness.<sup>46</sup>

43 Jeronim Perović, "The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9, no. 2 (2007): 58.

44 Bokvoy, *Peasants and Communists*, 66–67, 85.

45 Stanko Juriša, "Agrarna politika i problemi kolektivizacije u Jugoslaviji u vrijeme sukoba KPJ s Informbiroom", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 15, no. 1 (1983): 61.

46 Maticka, "Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj," 197.

The building blocks for it were already in place but the fallout with the Soviet Union put the entire process into overdrive. It started with the conversion of general agricultural cooperatives into peasant work cooperatives.<sup>47</sup> There were four levels of integration in a cooperative. In the first and second stages, the peasant is part of a cooperative that leases the land that he owns. On the next level, the peasant renounces his compensation from the cooperative. The final stage required the complete renouncement of ownership in favour of the cooperative and was most prevalent during the collectivization.<sup>48</sup> This was achieved by the forceful inclusion of peasants who still operated as individuals. Local officials often used underhand tactics, such as confiscation of products and even physical abuse. The entire process suffered from bad organization and a lack of clear guidelines.<sup>49</sup> It was compounded by policies from the government, whose taxation and buyouts benefited the fourth stage of the cooperative.<sup>50</sup>

The collectivization was successful when taking into account the number of registered peasant work cooperatives. While their number grew exponentially, the general agrarian cooperatives saw a steep fall.<sup>51</sup> The people who accepted the collectivization were colonists, poor peasants and returnees who thought that the state would improve their living conditions. This is evident from the fact that the highest percentages of peasant work cooperatives were in Vojvodina and Slavonia.<sup>52</sup>

47 Vlada Ugrinčić, „Uloga i značaj zemljoradničkih zadruga u našoj agrarnoj politici i socijalističkom preobražaju sela“, *Sociologija i prostor: časopis za istraživanje prostornog i sociokulturnog razvoja* 34 (1971): 50.

48 Maticka, „Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj“, 198.

49 Bokvoy, *Peasants and Communists*, 66–67, 122.

50 Maticka, „Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj“, 198.

51 Bokvoy, *Peasants and Communists*, 66–67, 124.

52 Cifrić, „KPJ/SKJ i seljaštvo“, 10.

Still, some of the colonists resisted the change and were subject to the same pressures as other peasants. An apparent depiction of those methods is presented in Bulajić's second work, *The Promised Land*. In this film, the former representative played the role of enforcer and used any means to bring unruly peasants into the fold. In one particular scene, a riled-up mob almost lynch an uncooperative peasant, forcing him to wear a sign that says: *I am a kulak*.<sup>53</sup> Despite this, the bigger private farms continued their stubborn resistance. This is evident from the numbers in Croatia where only 15% of peasant farms with around 12% of total agricultural land joined cooperatives.<sup>54</sup>

In one of his speeches, Tito rebuked the idea of land theft and promoted collectivization as the elevation of the peasantry from backwardness and poverty. He argued that the cultivation of a collectivist spirit would preserve the peasantry from starvation and overwork. The role of cooperatives was one of organization, ability and unification. Ownership of the buildings and tools belonged to everyone who worked there and their descendants. Despite the situation in the field, he stated that nobody had a right to enforce the cooperatives and that the individual peasant would sooner or later realize that it was in his interest to join due to the various benefits.<sup>55</sup>

The clash with Cominform also marked the definite scrapping of plans for the second phase of colonisation which consisted of building new colonial settlements. The village of Krdnija was named as a possible location for that project, but in reality, it was one of numerous empty villages.<sup>56</sup> The state also imagined the creation of two particular types of colonist

53 *Obećana zemlja*, 1986.

54 Maticka, "Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj", 198.

55 "Josip Broz Tito 1892–1980 o poljoprivredi i selu", *Sociologija i prostor: časopis za istraživanje prostornog i sociokulturnog razvoja* 67–68 (1980): 2.

56 Maticka, "Kolonizacija u Hrvatskoj", 34.



settlements. The first was meant for people with war-inflicted disabilities, and the other was for war orphans. For obvious reasons, those settlements would have to rely on an external workforce in cultivating the land.<sup>57</sup> Although the first type was established in the village of Karačevo, Vojvodina, the plans for the second type never came to fruition.

Due to fragmentation of the land that entered cooperatives, the state began the process of land consolidation. The entire process was badly executed despite the specialized laws, decrees and dedicated commissions.<sup>58</sup> Even the colonists resisted the idea of switching the land or houses as an adjustment to the new policy in the countryside. In the previously mentioned Stanišić, despite the early participation in peasant cooperatives, there are numerous examples of people rejecting the land consolidation. This is evident from the papers of the Land Consolidation Commission in Sombor, where some colonists protested verbally or outright refused to participate in the administrative side of the process by not signing the documents or not showing up at the meeting. The commission paid no heed to the complaints and usually ruled for consolidation to happen, attributing the disobedience to improper behaviour or political leanings of the individual.<sup>59</sup> The ill preparation and lack of professional help in the field made registering the changes in cadastre and land registry useless.<sup>60</sup> After the exponential growth of cooperatives, the first signs of stagnation were evident in 1952. Contrary to the government predictions,

57 Zakon o agrarnoj reformi i kolonizaciji (Zagreb 1945.), 15–16.

58 Vjenceslav Medić, “Devedeset godina komasacija u Hrvatskoj”, *Sociologija i prostor: časopis za istraživanje prostornog i sociokulturnog razvoja* 119–120 (1993): 111–112.

59 Istorijski arhiv Sombor, F-150, Narodni odbor opštine Stanišić (1944–1962), kut. 123.

60 Medić, “Devedeset godina komasacija u Hrvatskoj”, 111–112.

productivity remained low. The state was constantly struggling to equip the cooperatives. This approach to socialist change in the countryside had been proven a failure and the leadership admitted so at the end of the same year.<sup>61</sup>

The process of collectivization in Yugoslavia lasted up until 1953 when the state decided to abandon it in favour of self-managed socialism. During the reorganization, cooperatives were either liquidated or combined into general peasant cooperatives or became social agricultural farms. This was followed up by the second agrarian reform in 1953 that limited the land to a maximum of 10 ha. The same land limit was set for peasants that left the cooperative.<sup>62</sup> This amount of land was viewed as appropriate so that it would not cause class exploitation.<sup>63</sup> The rest remained in the hands of the state which gave it to agricultural organizations for permanent use. The focus shifted to the link between the social agricultural farms and their cooperation with private owners. The goal was to show that productivity was the main indicator of socialist ownership and not the amount of collectivized land.<sup>64</sup> The second agrarian reform and the botched attempt at land consolidation created a complicated situation with numerous legal issues. In 1954, the Law of Land Consolidation was introduced to address the chaos in the villages and lay the foundation for proper development of the land.<sup>65</sup>

61 Maticka, "Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj", 198.

62 Ibid., 199.

63 Cifrić, "KPJ/SKJ i seljaštvo", 8.

64 Maticka, "Zemljovlasnički odnosi u Hrvatskoj", 199.

65 Medić, *Devedeset godina komasacija*, 112.

*Aftermath*

Later, the leadership had an unfavourable opinion of collectivization. They stated that it was a hindrance to the proper development of cooperatives in the villages and that socialism was on track as long as the socialist sector had a bigger output in production when compared to the private sector.<sup>66</sup> Tito's speech in 1955 presented the period of collectivization as a necessary countermeasure for the food shortage. He admitted that some cooperatives were made without proper logistical, technical, material or phytological support. He reinforced the policy of gradual integration of peasants into cooperatives that was promoted before collectivization.<sup>67</sup>

However, the damage was already done. The decline in general support amongst the peasantry can be seen in the case of Vojvodina. In the immediate post-war period, they formed the majority of the Party members. That number was cut almost in half by 1953 due to the collectivization and land consolidation.<sup>68</sup> Due to the dire situation in the villages some peasants turned to work outside of agriculture. Ironically, that kickstarted the social transference of peasants into workers.<sup>69</sup> Disaffection with the Party policies during the collectivization unsettled the newcomers. Some of them renounced their land, as they felt that they had never truly owned it in the first place. After that decision, they chose one of two paths. The first group moved towards urban areas in order to get a job in an industry that was picking up the pace due to the Party's

66 Cifrić, "KPJ/SKJ i seljaštvo", 11.

67 "Josip Broz Tito o poljoprivredi i selu", *Sociologija i prostor*, 4.

68 Borislav Dimković, „Kretanje broja seljaka-komunista Vojvodine u posleratnom periodu“, *Sociologija i prostor: časopis za istraživanje prostornog i sociokulturnog razvoja* 26, (1969): 41–42.

69 Cifrić, "KPJ/SKJ i seljaštvo", 11.

focus on it. That reallocation spawned *wild* suburbs which were eventually properly integrated into expanding towns and cities.<sup>70</sup> The second group were returnees that joined up with the cooperatives in their old villages. They did this in order to reacquire their former possessions even before the verification from the administration. In some cases, the status of returnees who came back in 1949 was not solved until 1955.<sup>71</sup>

In conclusion, the government's plan to use the colonists as a political backbone in the countryside of Slavonia and Vojvodina only partially paid off. The agrarian reform and colonization managed to raise the average size of peasant properties and the number of households. As one of the factors in stabilizing the Yugoslav economy, it laid the groundwork for rapid industrialization. However, when the Party decided to abandon the process of gradual socialization of the countryside, it caused turmoil among peasants, including the colonists. While some of them did play a big role in forming and propagating the peasants' workers cooperatives, others resisted fiercely. The pressure to shift from individual to collective ownership evaporated most of the goodwill of the settlers. So, in both a political and economic sense, collectivization and land consolidation were a giant misstep in the Party's treatment of the countryside. The only unintentional blessing was the amassment of uneducated workers that could take part in the industrialization of Yugoslavia. As for the fate of Dalmatians who took part in the colonization, they either adapted, moved closer to the urban areas, or returned to their old properties. Because of this, the colonization effort is still vivid in the collective memory of modern-day Slavonia, Vojvodina and Dalmatia.

70 Vojislav Đurić, „Neke prostorne posledice socijalnih procesa u vojvođanskom selu“, *Sociologija i prostor: časopis za istraživanje prostornog i sociokulturnog razvoja* 17, (1967): 54.

71 HR-DAŠI 29, kut 29.

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### *Summary*

The agrarian reform and colonization that occurred from 1945 to 1948 is a culmination of the processes of land redistribution that started in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Although colonization was initially a long-term project, it was concluded by the beginning of 1948. Its effects are still visible in the wider consciousness of the people whose predecessors were, in some way, tied to it. This paper analyzes this event from the perspective of colonists who settled in Slavonia and Vojvodina. It tackles the reasons for the relocation of certain groups, the methods of the redistribution of land, and how it permanently changed society in the region. It shows the government's steady approach that transitioned from a necessity to repopulate emptied areas, where they put the economy before ideology, towards setting building blocks for the cooperatives. It also addresses the settlers' individualist stance and uneasiness towards any encroachment on personal properties. The gradual introduction of socialist structures in the village, through the various policies, changed in 1948. The conflict with Cominform drastically accelerated the socialization of the countryside. The policies tied to collectivization and land consolidation were inconsistent and damaged the relations between the colonists and the Party. The government shifted its approach towards the countryside in 1953, but the commotion concerning the ownership of the land was felt well into the 1950s. This impacted the colonists who struggled with adaptation to the new land and they either moved to the larger urban areas or returned home.



*Agrarna reforma in kolonizacija  
kot temelja za legitimno oblast  
jugoslovanske socialistične vlade:  
Prehod h kolektivizaciji v Slavoniji  
in Vojvodini*

*Povzetek*

Agrarna reforma in kolonizacija, ki sta potekali med letoma 1945 in 1948, predstavljata vrhunec procesov prerazporeditve zemljišč, ki so se začeli v Kraljevini Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev. Čeprav je bila kolonizacija sprva obravnavana kot dolgoročen projekt, se je zaključila v začetku leta 1948. Njeni učinki so še vedno prisotni v širši zavesti ljudi, katerih predhodniki so bili povezani z njo. Prispevek analizira to dogajanje z vidika kolonistov, ki so se naselili v Slavoniji in Vojvodini. Obravnava razloge za preselitev določenih skupin, metode prerazporeditve zemljišč in predstavlja, kako so ti procesi trajno zaznamovali družbo v regiji. Prispevek predstavlja delovanje vlade, ki je v začetku temeljilo na potrebi po ponovnem naseljevanju izpraznjenih območij, kjer je gospodarstvo prevladalo nad ideologijo, nato pa prešlo k vzpostavljanju temeljev za nastanek kmetijskih zadrug. Poleg tega prispevek naslavlja tudi individualistično držo naseljencev in njihovo nasprotovanje vsakršnim posegom v osebno lastnino. Postopno uvajanje socialističnih struktur v

vasi skozi različne politike se je spremenilo leta 1948. Spor z Informbirojem je drastično pospešil socializacijo podeželja. Politike, povezane s kolektivizacijo in komasacijo zemljišč, so bile nedosledne in so škodovala odnosom med kolonisti in Komunistično partijo. Leta 1953 je vlada spremenila svoj odnos do podeželja, vendar je bilo nemir v zvezi z lastništvom zemljišč čutiti tudi v naslednjih letih. To je vplivalo na koloniste, ki so se s težavo privajali na novo okolje, zato so se številni preselili v večja urbana območja ali se vrnili domov.