CONFERENCE REPORTS

Eastward Extensions of European Economic History: The Harvard Studies of the Economy of Ukraine

V. N. Bandera
Temple University, Philadelphia

In both the Soviet Union and in the West, there is a growing interest in regional economic analysis of the USSR. The key problems are the spatial efficiency of resource allocation, the technique of territorial management in an otherwise centrally planned system, and economic equity as it relates to regional differences in living standards and the survival of various nationalities. Soviet economic historians try to interpret the Soviet experience and their earlier history. Western historians have directed their attention primarily to phenomena that transcend political boundaries, such as the spread of technology, urbanization, international capital movements, and the like. A conference and two special lectures that recently took place at Harvard University afford an opportunity to review the state of scholarship on the economic history of the Ukraine as well as of the other Soviet republics.

The conference on « The Economy of the Ukraine within the USSR » was held on September 28-29, 1975 under the sponsorship of Harvard University, Temple University, and the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. While the objective was to interpret the economy of the Ukrainian Republic within the current Soviet system, several papers contained historical background. Thus the paper by I. S. Koropeckyj (Temple University) on « Economic Prerogatives of the Ukraine » surveyed the changing content of Soviet federalism from the standpoint of the degree of autonomy of the republic in economic decisions. In a paper « Ukrainian Economic Growth in a National Perspective », S. H. Cohn (State University of New York) presented an interesting though controversial hypothesis that the Ukraine is a mature economy relative to the relevant economic space and, hence, acts as a supplier of capital for the underdeveloped regions, much as the Dutch exported capital in the XVII-XVIIIth centuries or, more recently, the northeastern states relative to the rest of the USA. The problem of the huge transfers of capital out of the Ukraine was also treated in a paper by Z. L. Melnyk (University of Cincinnati) from the standpoint of the Soviet financial system, and in a paper by V. N. Bandera (Temple University), from the standpoint of the participation of the Ukraine in intra-union and external trade.

Other papers dealt with such current economic problems as regional income distribution (G. Schroeder, University of Virginia), demographic and labor trends (D. F. Branson and F. D. Whitehouse, Washington), the potential for indigenous technological progress (M. Boretsky, Washington), the production and export of raw materials (L. Dienes, University of Kansas), pollution (C. Zum Brunnen, Ohio State University), and input-output structure of the Ukrainian economy (J. Gillula, Duke University).

Although the chairmen of the three sessions — P. Wiles (London School of Economics), H. Levine (University of Pennsylvania), and H. Hunter (Haverford College) — led the discussions in an expert manner, there was some lack of cohesion in the treatment of these diverse themes. This difficulty was not entirely overcome by the otherwise perceptive after-dinner speech by Professor Abram Bergson of Harvard, who dealt with the broader issues of political economy constituting the milieu in which the Soviet republics must function as economic and national entities. I. S. Koropeckyj presented a special seminar lecture on « The Ukrainian Economy in Western Interpretation » at the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. He evaluated the accumulated studies from the thematic and methodological standpoint.

One other academic endeavour reflecting Harvard's commitment to promote Ukrainian studies is worthy of note. On 24 October, 1975, the appointment of the first of three permanent professors of Ukrainian studies at Harvard was marked by special ceremonies. In his inaugural lecture on « The Origin of Kievan Rus' » the newly appointed Professor Omeljan Pritsak summarized his research that modifies fundamentally the Norman and the anti-Norman theories on the formation of Kievan state in the ninth century. Based on Arabic, Turkic, and Western archival sources, the new interpretation stresses that it was the need to protect trade routes and economic interests that generated the political and military superstructure in the territory between the Baltic and the Black Seas. The announced multivolume study promises to illuminate the interaction among the economic, political, religious, and demographic factors in the Kievan Rus', thus enhancing the horizons of the medieval history of Europe. Henry Rosovsky, a noted Japanese economic historian who presided over the inaugural ceremony, stated that while Harvard does not have the resources to study intensively each of the diverse regions of the USSR, it is nevertheless committed to promote Ukrainian studies.

The Harvard conference proved valuable in promoting new insights into the complex Soviet system that extends over a vast geographic expanse. Future participation of scholars from the Soviet Ukraine in such endeavours could well be mutually beneficial. In promoting these studies, one should keep in mind that neighbouring nations interact and face similar historical problems.

Since the European republics within the USSR and the adjacent East European countries sometimes shared a common past and now experience common systematic constraints, the economy of even a large national entity like the Ukraine should not be interpreted independently of the others but in relation to the entire Union and neighbouring countries.