

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CONSUMPTION IN EASTERN EUROPE:
POLAND, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, HUNGARY, AND EAST GERMANY.
By *Bogdan Mieczkowski*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975. xxiv, 342 pp.
Tables. \$21.50.

Mieczkowski's study consists of three parts. The first is a discussion of the theory and the political economy of consumption in Marxist thought and in socialist East Europe. Part 2 consists of studies of consumption in each of the four East European countries. Comparisons among these countries and conclusions make up part 3.

The study is broader than the title suggests. Mieczkowski attempts not only to describe and compare the levels, trends, and patterns of consumption in these four socialist economies, but also to explain them in terms of the economic policies and performance of each country. He establishes a framework of the economic factors most relevant to consumption which he applies to each country during the postwar years. These factors are the plan; the share of investment in GNP; the effects of changes in labor force participation and dependency ratios on the relationship between real wages per worker and per capita consumption; the direct contribution of foreign trade—that is, the net export or import surplus of consumer goods; the output of industrial consumer goods; the distribution of income among different groups; and the trend in real wages.

Given this framework, each country study is an economic history of the postwar years focused on the implications for the consumer. The section on Poland is by far the longest. The story is divided into four periods (or five, counting speculation about trends since the December 1970 Gdansk riots). Following the four case studies, there is a short comparison among them. The conclusions also include an interesting attempt to measure the relationship between changes in the rate of investment (whether resulting from plan or from unintended over or under-fulfillment of the investment plan) and changes in "residual consumption." The latter is defined as that part of the total change in consumption which could increase real per capita consumption beyond that absorbed by increases in population and in employment. This brings into focus the relatively narrow (short run) range within which competition between investment and consumption for resources is crucial, given the leadership's determination to maintain the rate of growth, and the political constraints against allowing consumption to decline.

The serious student of consumption and/or East Europe, if sophisticated and patient, will find much here that is interesting and illuminating. Unfortunately, the author does not appear to have thoroughly digested the material he presents; thus many readers will find the book indigestible too. Mieczkowski warns the reader at some length that the official statistics of these countries are probably unreliable, but he then presents a mass of official statistics with only an occasional indication of why a particular set of statistics is suspect. For example, the two chapters on Poland contain sixty tables, of which only two represent Western estimates. The utility of much of the statistical material is diminished by the absence of definitions of terms and of methodological explanations.

JANET G. CHAPMAN
University of Pittsburgh