

*Contemporary*  
**SOCIOLOGY**  
■ CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

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# C H A P T E R

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## • Rural Sociology

### WHAT IS RURAL SOCIOLOGY?

You may have an image in your mind of what rural sociology is. For many people rural sociology is a discipline that studies agricultural communities. That is true, but it is only part of the picture. One useful definition of rural sociology in Canada is that: rural sociology is the subdiscipline of sociology concerned with all aspects of rural social structure. In other words, rural sociologists study all aspects of the social organization of rural life. While agricultural production, distribution, and exchange are important parts of rural life, we need to also consider other forms of rural economic structure, such as the fisheries. We should also be aware of natural resource extraction of all kinds, such as mining, oil, and gas. There are many people who live in rural areas who are not necessarily farmers, and there are many people who live in urban or suburban areas who are a part of the agro-food complex.

### Specialization

Within sociology there are many subdisciplines. You are probably familiar already—at least by name—with such sociological subdisciplines as criminology and demography. Moreover, as you have seen in the preceding chapters, in addition to sociologists who specialize in subdisciplines there are also sociologists who emphasize various aspects of social organization or social institutions. However, such disciplinary specialization in terms of substantive themes is not usually considered to constitute work in separate subdisciplines of sociology.

Moreover, for substantive areas and for most subdisciplines within sociology there is one underlying assumption. Most sociologists in Canada and the United States, as well as in Europe, have emphasized those aspects of society that centre on *urban life*. Since today most of us live in cities it is not surprising that we tend to assume that most

sociological phenomena are urban. It is, in fact, not difficult to discuss Canadian, American, or French society *as if* there were practically no rural component at all. There tends to be an "urban bias" in most of our generalizations in sociology. Even those who are well aware of the existence of rural populations generally theorize about society as if the rural component were insignificant, a relic of the past. Rural phenomena are not emphasized by most sociologists in their substantive work or disciplinary specializations.

In this chapter we will try to discuss some of the problems that sociologists have had in conceptualizing rural issues. We believe that rural sociology used to be oriented to the study of a romanticized version of rural life based on an image of the family farm and the small town that does not conform with reality, past or present. Therefore, this chapter argues for the recognition of the importance of a new direction in rural sociology. We will call that newer approach to the study of rural life *critical rural sociology*. It has deep roots in an intellectual tradition in Canada that is called the political economy tradition.

Rural sociology has not been isolated from the ferment and dissension that wracked the social sciences in the Western, industrialized nations during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Disenchantment about the use of theory and the reliance on "abstracted empiricism" (Mills 1959) set in among many practitioners. Even in the United States, where there are many departments in land grant and agricultural and mechanical colleges, as well as universities devoted exclusively to research and teaching in rural sociology, there was a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the type of structural functional rural sociology that had been accepted as the conventional approach since before the end of World War II.

The challenge represented by critical rural sociology has developed around several related themes. Following, we will examine what we consider to be some of the most important of these. The discussion in the second part of this chapter will include sociological explanations of: rural protest movements, regional dimensions of agrarian development, concern with farm restructuring, development of the agro-food complex, and the future of rural society and rural sociology.

However, before we explore those topics from the perspective of critical rural sociology, it is worthwhile to examine in more detail the older structural functional tradition in rural sociology.

## STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONAL VERSUS CRITICAL RURAL SOCIOLOGY

### Changing Theories

In the last few decades there has been considerable debate about which aspects of rural life should be emphasized by rural sociologists. In Canada and the U.S., both before and after World War II, mainstream rural sociology tended to emphasize rural farm communities and the *farm family*. Indeed, most rural sociologists were men and—to a lesser extent—women, who had been born and raised on family farms in the U.S. and Canada. In the first part of this chapter we will discuss the traditional theoretical paradigm that was dominant in rural sociology up until comparatively recently. Then we will turn our attention to the more critical approach of the new rural sociology.'

### Rural Life or Small Town America?

The subject matter of the subdiscipline of sociology called rural sociology potentially deals with *all* aspects of rural life.<sup>2</sup> However, not all aspects have received equal attention. There has been selectivity in terms of the theoretical problems studied and the theoretical explanations offered. Thus, for example, it was not customary in the past for rural sociologists to pay particular attention to rural-based natural resource industries and communities. The topic was sometimes discussed, but it was not seen as central to the subdiscipline of rural sociology. Moreover, there was usually not much interest shown in the study of native people by rural sociologists, perhaps in part because that was considered the proper field of study for cultural anthropologists.<sup>3</sup> There were many areas of study that were left out in addition to those two. The tendency was to focus on one set of questions.

What was emphasized was the study of the rural small town and its adjacent rural farms. For example, rural sociology studied such "institutions" as kinship, religion, education, health care, law, politics, and economics in their rural, small town context. A great deal of attention was paid to ways in which the rural community was different from the urban metropolitan centre. Many American rural sociology textbooks typically contain material on the rural community from a structural functional rural

it was an analysis of rural life that emphasized the perspective of the North American family farmer, who was typically viewed as a male head of household. We are usually presented with an analysis of the situation as viewed by the farmer and his wife. There was a male-centred and family-farm-centred bias as well as a small town bias in the way in which rural sociology was studied. The newer, critical rural sociology attempts to move beyond such assumptions. We attempt to do so both by rethinking some of the older theoretical formulations and by doing different kinds of empirical research. That is necessary because the older paradigm no longer provides us with the intellectual tools needed for the study of a rapidly changing situation. Lack of proper theoretical conceptualization leads to failure to deal with the issues in a significant manner.

## Structural Functional Rural Sociology

Internationally, rural sociology has been dominated by American writers. Even though there are rural sociologists in many other countries of the world, including Canada, who are members of the Rural Sociological Society (RSS), nevertheless the paradigm employed by rural sociologists was very much American. (The International Rural Sociological Society has in part been modelled on the American-dominated RSS and has tended to use the same paradigm in the past.) That paradigm was a modified version of structural functionalism.<sup>5</sup> The aspect of structural functionalism that was most significant in shaping rural sociology was the belief that rural communities were "structures" that "functioned" in a particular manner. As stated above, rural communities

*Although rural-urban migration is by no means a phenomenon characteristic only of present-day rural areas, it is of increasing importance when the characteristics of the migrants are taken into consideration: The migrants are generally the younger individuals or family units who are also the better educated and/or skilled segments of their respective populations. This youthful migration has resulted in:*

- 1) *An increasingly aged rural population with accompanying changes in the demands for various goods and services. This increasing age of farm operators is also of considerable concern within the agricultural community. The question now being asked is: Who will be the farmers of the future,*
- 2) *A leadership vacuum in the rural areas whereby the available leadership positions go to the older, more conservative segments by 'default' as the younger and*

*more energetic segments, essential for the maintenance, growth or potential revitalization of rural communities, are removed.*

- 3) *A general sense of alienation and powerlessness among the rural people as they do not have full control over forces which are related to depopulation of rural areas.*

*In addition to the apparent differential effects of migration on the rural communities, other variables which may be used to account for these differential growth patterns are transportation and distance to larger centers, and the increasing vertical integration and centralization of community centered organizations, institutions and services outwardly from the local area and the accompanying decline in the decision-making power of the individual and local community units.*

*People living in rural areas have a sense of powerlessness. They do not seem to have control over their socio-*

*economic environment. This creates a sense of alienation, apathy and powerlessness on the part of individual farmers. My cannot relate to or control these giant bureaucracies and powerful organizations which control their destiny. Local organizations are not effective and relevant in bringing about important changes in rural communities. Another reason for the sense of apathy and powerlessness is the fact that some individuals, as noted previously, who have the ability to perform leadership roles in rural communities, leave for urban areas. This process leaves rural communities with traditional and sometimes outdated leadership structures.*

Source: Adapted from Gurcham Basran. 1979. 'The Rural Depopulation of the Prairies.' In *Economy, Class and Social Reality*, ed. John Fry. Toronto: Buttenvorths, 391-410.

were viewed as small, isolated farming towns and surrounding farms. The social, political, and cultural relationships between people were characterized by consensus, the supposedly normal state of the social organism. There tended to be a romanticization of the North American rural community. What most American and Canadian rural sociologists seem to have had in mind was the Midwestern or Prairie small town. Thus, it was assumed that there was a specifically rural way of life that could be characterized in terms of its differences when compared with the North American urban way of life (Wirth 1938) of cities like Chicago and Montreal. Rural sociology was a study of the smooth functioning of rural institutions, with special emphasis on the farm family as the bedrock of North American agriculture and rural community. Conflict was often viewed as a result of the social disorganization that emerged as a result of urbanization and the erosion of the rural community and the family farm.

## TOENNIES' THEORY: RURAL VERSUS URBAN?

The work of Ferdinand Toennies, a nineteenth-century German philosopher, has been central to many rural sociological investigations of rural communities and the rural family farm. Toennies was often cited as a significant contributor to rural sociological theory in early publications.<sup>6</sup> However, Toennies' ideas were generally misunderstood and interpreted out of context. That has been an explicit or implicit argument made by many rural sociologists in Canada and elsewhere. A recent Canadian textbook has tended to implicitly take that position (Dasgupta 1988, 4-17). Generally, Toennies is viewed by many rural sociologists as either the originator of the dichotomy between *rural community* and urban *mass society* or one among many theorists who have distinguished between various aspects of *community* and *society*. Thus, Dasgupta follows along a well-worn path when he presents Toennies as merely the first among a series of authors who have created such polar typologies. Other authors include Durkheim (*mechanical* versus *organic* solidarity), Cooley (primary versus *secondary* groups), Becker (*sacred* versus *secular* society), and Redfield (*folk* versus urban). Dasgupta argues (1988, 7-8) that these typologies have common features which have general applicability to the study of rural phenomena in Canada in terms

A few authors have understood the general thrust of Toennies' early work on *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. It was pointed out in 1963 by Charles P. Loomis, the famous rural sociologist who first introduced Toennies' 1887 book in 1957, that Marx played a key role in Toennies' thinking at an early stage. Loomis writes that Toennies notes in his "1921 book on Marx that *Community and Society* [i.e., *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*] had been deeply influenced by Marx's writings" (Toennies 1963, ix). Toennies states:

my views had been most thoroughly influenced in a motivating, informative, and confirming manner by quite different works of three outstanding authors: namely, the works of Sir Henry Maine, O. Gierke, and of the most remarkable and most profound social philosopher, Karl Marx, whose views on economics were most important for me (Toennies 1963, xv).

In other words, it was not until 1963 that Loomis made it clear that the term *Gemeinschaft* referred not only to community but also to precapitalist communalism or communism and that the type of society characterized by Toennies as a *Gesellschaft* was principally intended to depict postfeudal, modern urban capitalism of the sort described by Marx, Sombart, Weber, and other German historians, economists, jurists, and sociologists. Hence, it is ironic that a book, which could just as easily have been translated under the title *Communism and Capitalism*, was taken by structural functionalist rural sociologists as the key to the ideas of this thirty-two-year-old theorist!

The main reason for this was that Toennies' ideas were not discussed in context. He was misinterpreted, for example, by commentators like Pitirim Sorokin, who tended to view him as a theorist concerned with abstract concepts that were not rooted in any particular set of historical events or changes (Toennies 1963, vii-viii). Others, including Loomis (Toennies 1963, 12-29) tended to view Toennies as a purely abstract theorist in a "grand theory" or "typological" tradition of paired opposites. Hence, it was easy to accept him as a theorist who clarified the changes that had taken place historically and were still taking place in North America, from rural communities to "urban society."

### What Do the German Words Mean?

Toennies made a distinction between two composite "ideal type" concepts—*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.<sup>8</sup>

labels. That leaves many undergraduate students guessing. While the terms are probably best left untranslated because they are umbrella (*portmanteau*) words that cover a whole set of subsidiary ideal types, nevertheless it is important to look at their roots. Even native speakers of German do not fully appreciate exactly how Toennies used the terms in the 1880s since the terms have a different meaning in German today.

The first term is *Gemeinschaft*, from the German root word *gemein* meaning "communal" or "common" as in to hold in common. A *Gemeinschaft*, therefore, is a community or communal society. It is, in other words, the same kind of society Karl Marx had in mind when he wrote about primitive communism. It is likely that Toennies meant precapitalist communal society or communist society by his use of the term *Gemeinschaft*.

Even though the term is usually translated simply as community in most American structural functionalist rural sociology textbooks, it could just as easily be translated as communism. Indeed, the 1887 preface to the first edition of the book was subtitled: *Essay on Communism and Socialism as Empirical Forms of Culture* (Toennies 1963, xv). That preface was left out of the standard edition used by most American and Canadian rural sociologists, and sociologists generally.

The other German term is *Gesellschaft*, from the root word *Gesell*, meaning "modern society," "urban society," or "capitalist society."<sup>9</sup> It is very likely that Toennies was basically talking about the same phenomenon Karl Marx called capitalist society. That is, a *Gesellschaft* is a society characterized by a capitalist mode of production.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CANADA

When we examine the historical development of Canada as a nation-state in terms of the sociological study of social change, it immediately becomes evident that we cannot merely talk about urban structures, institutions, and organizations. That is because Canada, throughout most of its history, has been dominated by *rural life*. Moreover, Canada is not alone in that respect. Most of the nation-states in the world today were once largely rural, and many still are. In addition to the large rural populations that still exist in many countries, particularly underdeveloped or "peripheral" countries, there is a rural historical background that must be taken into account. We cannot properly understand the present if we do not have some clear ideas about the past. Our rural her-

itage, therefore, is important to consider when we make theoretical and empirical generalizations about the present.

Moreover, the rural sector is still extremely important to the Canadian economy and polity, as it is elsewhere. Not only are Canadian agricultural commodities—like wheat and soya—exported all over the world, there are also other natural resource extraction industries of great economic importance to Canada. The Canadian fishing industry is also largely based in rural areas, of course. Hence, while the percentage of people who live and work in rural areas is relatively small, their importance for Canada's future is great. The percentage of Canadians who make their living cultivating food is even smaller. No more than 34 percent of Canadian households are directly involved in food production. Nevertheless, the rural agricultural sector continues to be important for Canada as a whole. Agriculture and other primary industries are significant for the economic and social well-being of all Canadians, regardless of whether we live in rural or urban places.

Rural life is characterized by relations of production that have to do with primary industries: agriculture, fisheries, natural resource extraction, and timber. Most people who live and work in rural areas are directly or indirectly involved in activities that involve primary production. However, most rural people are not involved in factory production. The type of productive activity that people in rural areas are involved in tends to influence the types of relationships that they have with one another.

## Rapid Social Change

In North America, rural life has been changing rapidly. For example, while 80 percent of Canadians lived in rural areas in 1870, only 25 percent live in rural areas today (see table 25.1).

Canada, like most technologically developed countries, has experienced a decline in the proportion of the population that is rural. Since World War II there has been a very rapid increase in the urban population in Canada. Moreover, while people living in rural areas were once isolated from the mainstream, changes in mass media (newspapers, radio, television, and movies) have made it difficult today to distinguish a qualitative different and separate rural way of life. Improved transportation has greatly diminished the distance rural people have had to travel in order to be in

Table 25.1  
DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL AND URBAN POPULATION OF  
CANADA, 1811-1981

Census	Canada	Rural	'Urban
Year	Number	(%)	(%)
1871	3 689 930	80.4	19.6
1881	4 324 800	74.3	25.7
1891	4 833 200	68.2	31.8
1901	5 371 300	62.5	37.5
1911	7 106 603	54.6	45.4
1921	8 787 900	50.5	49.5
1931	10 376 800	46.3	53.7
1941	11 506 700	45.7	54.3
1951	14 MG 400	38.4	61.6
1961	18 238 200	30.4	69.6
1971	21 568 300	23.9	76.1
1981	24 343 200	24.3	75.7

Source: From various censuses of Canada.



*High-powered farm machinery allows farmers to work much larger acreages, but has contributed to their growing debt burden.*

centres. While there was once a very clear subculture of farmers, today it is often very difficult to tell the difference between a group of Canadian farmers and a group of nonfarm business people in terms of such variables as knowledge of the world, dress and general appearance, and sophistication. Indeed, many—though not all—Canadian farmers, both male and female, would like to be considered agribusiness persons. Hence, there are many aspects of change in rural life that need to be considered by a student interested in social change, and in sociology generally.

The critical approach to rural sociology does not rely on merely analytical typologies. Instead, there is an attempt to move to a more comparative and historical perspective.<sup>9</sup> While we cannot detail all aspects of such a perspective here, it is important to note that critical rural sociology is oriented to a more multidisciplinary and comparative approach than the structural functional rural sociology of the 1950s and 1960s, which tended at times to be hampered by an ethnocentric and ahistorical viewpoint."

## RURAL SOCIOLOGY FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Canadian rural life cannot be understood today apart from the political and economic history of Canada, including the intellectual history of the development of social sciences in Canada. Of course, in this chapter it is not possible to present a detailed discussion of the

structural correlates between the economic and political contexts, on the one hand, and the general pattern of Canadian social philosophy and social science, on the other. But it should be understood that rural sociology has never been a recognized disciplinary specialization in Canada in the way in which it has been in the United States. While some Canadian sociologists have studied rural life, they have tended to do so with "imported" theoretical models and concerns. Some of the imports were from the United States, but others were from Western Europe, particularly Great Britain, France, and Germany. Those imports, however, have definitely been modified. There are, therefore, a number of distinctively Canadian authors and contributions to the study of rural life in Canada and to the study of rural life more generally. Many of the earliest Canadian studies already show a critical thrust and, hence, can be viewed as contributing to the newer rural sociology. We will review some of the classical Canadian contributions to the study of rural life before moving on to the analysis of more contemporary questions.

In Canada, the newer rural sociology is also based upon a distinctively Canadian tradition that grew out of our colonial heritage and that has antecedents in European social philosophy and historical study. Some of the earliest Canadian contributions to the social sciences were concerned with rural issues. Thus, for example, Leon Gerin focused on the French-Canadian rural family in his first book.<sup>12</sup> In this book and subsequent monographs, Gerin described how

the *habitant family* became "the cornerstone of the French regime in Quebec" (Hiller 1981, 16).

At McGill University there was stress on fieldwork research like that undertaken by Robert Park's students at the University of Chicago. However, that interest was translated into rural fieldwork. Works like Horace Miner's *St. Denis: A French-Canadian Parish* (1939) show the influence of Everett C. Hughes, who had come to Montreal from Chicago. Also at McGill (from 1922 to 1932) was Carl A. Dawson, a Chicago Ph.D. In the 1930s the Carnegie Endowment funded work on frontiers of settlement. The monographs which resulted from that project are important for the study of rural life in frontier Canada. Between 1934 and 1940 there were eight volumes published out of the project.

At Toronto, S.D. Clark was one of the first sociologists interested in the study of rural life. Clark, who had been influenced by Hughes, was also working in the tradition established by Harold Adams Innis and others at Toronto who were establishing a staples theory.<sup>3</sup> The well-known Canadian scholar, Harold Adams Innis, argued that the key to understanding Canada's past is the production of commodities for export. Innis sketched a theory of economic and political development built on staples-based export production. Innis's work on the fur trade, the cod fisheries, the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the wheat trade has influenced many Canadian thinkers. Much of what Innis wrote about could be classified under the rubric of what we are discussing here as critical rural sociology.

Canadian sociologists concerned with rural issues in more recent times have built on this earlier tradition. They have attempted to move beyond the structural functional American rural sociological tradition. Specifically, they challenge the ahistorical bias of structural functionalism, its inattention to the role of economic forces in shaping rural society, and its relative neglect of rural conflict and political protest movements. They attempt to analyse rural life on the basis of the theoretical contributions of classical sociological theorists like Marx, Weber, and Toennies. Critical rural sociologists have emphasized certain aspects of Karl Marx's theory, in particular, Marx's concepts of **forces of production** and **social relations of production**.<sup>4</sup> This has led to a fruitful concern with production, distribution, and exchange relations. Emphasis on production, distribution, and exchange has been viewed by many critical rural sociologists as a better starting point for understanding rural society. More recently, some rural sociologists

have also incorporated a "de-Parsonized" version of Weber's approach, particularly Weber's comparative analysis of classes and administrative bureaucracies. From Marx and Weber (and the European traditions they epitomize) French- and English-speaking rural sociologists in Canada have increasingly emphasized a concern with *historical* and comparative analysis of rural social structure (see Bakker 1988; Barrett 1979; Barrett and Apostle 1987; Clement 1986; Friedmann 1978a; 1978b; Ghorayshi 1987; Hedley 1988; Lessard 1976; Murphy 1987; Sacouman 1980; Sinclair 1980; Stirling and Conway 1988; Thiessen and Davis 1988; Winson 1983; 1985; 1988; 1990).

In the remainder of this chapter we will attempt to give the reader some idea of the most significant sociological themes that have preoccupied students of rural Canada in recent times.

## Sociological Explanations of Rural Protest Movements

It could be said that through their interests in the study of rural protest movements, Canadians were among the first to contribute to the development of a critical approach to rural studies. As we have noted, students of rural Canada had the ground prepared for them by the legacy of the political economy research tradition of an earlier period. Such individuals as Harold A. Innis, with his work on the impact of staples production (furs, fish, wheat, and lumber) on the character of Canadian development, lay at the core of this tradition. The work of Innis and others, such as Vernon Fowke and his *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (1957), provided a broad foundation upon which the study of rural society could build in this country.

Perhaps the first theme to receive serious attention was the phenomenon of rural political protest in the West. Prairie farm movements brought attention to a reality that contradicted the dominant (structural functional) view in the social sciences of society as an essentially classless and stable social organism, normally devoid of serious social tensions. Studies such as C.B. Macpherson's classic *Democracy in Alberta* (1953) were to argue the value of economic structures and social class as key determinants of political organizations and ideology in rural contexts.

Macpherson put emphasis on the "quasi-colonial status" of the Prairie economy, which was "developed as an area for the profitable investment of capital, as a market for manufactured goods, and as a source of



merchandising and carrying profits" (1953, 7). He also emphasized the significance of the *class* composition of Prairie society. Specifically, Macpherson established that in Alberta society the main economic activity—farming—was overwhelmingly dominated by a class of agricultural producers that organized production primarily on the basis of *family labour*. The numerical dominance of these **petty commodity producers** meant that Alberta's class structure was relatively homogeneous. Macpherson hypothesized that the relative absence of opposing class interests within the province meant that a multiparty political system was not favoured to express or moderate conflicting class interests (1953, 21). Moreover, the West's hostility to the dominance of Eastern Canada in its economic affairs, that is, the West's quasi-colonial situation, also led to an aversion by its people to the two-party system of Liberals and Conservatives that characterized Eastern Canadian politics. This opened the way for one-party rule in Alberta and the degeneration of democratic practice to the point where government by means of plebiscites became the norm. This is the form that politics under Social Credit essentially took in Alberta beginning in the 1930s.

Thus with Macpherson's early work, emphasis is given to the roles of economic dependence and class structure in determining the prevailing forms of political organization and the content of politics that came to typify the West as a region. But Macpherson also developed the important thesis that it was the contradictory *class position* of rural petty commodity producers that accounts for their characteristic oscillation between conservatism and radicalism at the political level. Macpherson argued that the farmer's relation to the market was such that she or he was not dependent upon the labour market, either as a seller or buyer of labour. This reinforced a fundamental part of the family farmers' outlook—that they were *independent* operators. However, this independence was illusory, says Macpherson, because they had to sell in a market in which they exercised little control over the prices that they would receive for the products of their labour.

The relatively homogeneous nature of Prairie farmers as a class allowed them, argued Macpherson, to organize both politically and economically, and to develop a consciousness of common interests. But this agrarian consciousness was a delusive one because "it fails to comprehend the essential class position of the independent producers, that is, their ambiguous position in an economy increasingly dominated by capital" (1953, 227). These agrarian producers may be

prone to rebel, but their view of themselves as entrepreneurs prevents unduly radical behaviour. They are "at once hostile to and acquiescent in the established order" (1953, 229).

The relationship between social structure, social organization, and political behaviour explored by Macpherson forty years ago has helped spark more recent sociological inquiry. Some research has used comparisons between the West and the Maritimes to argue that the *strength* of rural protest movements may be a factor of the *density of social ties* binding farmers together. The more farmers are drawn together in voluntary organizations, such as farm co-operatives, the more likely a strong protest movement will take shape (Brym 1978). On the other hand, it has been hypothesized that protest will take on a more right-wing flavour as in Alberta, the greater the degree of independence of the farming population, and the greater density of ties between farmers and nonworking-class urban groups. A loss of independence, on the other hand, together with closer ties with urban workers is associated with more progressive protest movements, as in Saskatchewan (Bryan 1978).

#### Regional Dimensions of Agrarian Development

The Canadian political economy tradition, which had laid particular stress on the characteristics of staples in shaping economic and social development, has also been influential in the interpretation of regional differences in agricultural development in Canada. For example, in John McCallum's study *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (1980), it is argued that the characteristics of wheat as a commodity imported considerable dynamism to Ontario agriculture in comparison to Quebec, where wheat production never became as significant. The demand for wheat in England created the possibility for viable wheat production in Ontario, which in turn provided a stimulus to the rest of the economy. The nature of this stimulus is characterized by different types of *economic linkages*. The *backward linkages* of wheat production entailed the stimulus given to local investment in industries that provided inputs to facilitate wheat expansion. The demand that wheat gave to expansion of the local transportation system, and especially to the railways is a good example here. Railroad construction and the manufacture of rolling stock were significant early industrial activities promoted by the necessity of getting wheat from inland areas out to port facilities from where it could be exported to

arising from wheat production was the impetus it gave to the local farm implements industry at the time.

Wheat production also entailed important *forward linkages*—*economic activities* related to the further local processing of the staple. Local grist mills to grind wheat into flour were a good example of this. Finally, wheat also provided what staple theorists termed *final demand linkages*. This was the stimulus given to domestic industry to produce consumer goods for producers of the staple, i.e., for the farmers. The strength of this stimulus was in turn determined by more sociological factors: for example, the characteristics of the rural class structure would play a major role in determining the average level of disposable income within the agricultural population, and therefore the ability to purchase household consumption goods, as well as production inputs such as farm implements.

In wheat-producing countries such as Argentina, where much of the best land has been controlled by a small class of large landowners, disposable income has tended to be concentrated in fewer hands as well, providing a relatively small rural market for the mass production of consumption goods and production inputs. In Ontario, on the other hand, farming has been carried on by a much more numerous class of petty commodity producers. Agricultural income was relatively more equitably distributed, therefore, and aggregate demand for urban manufactured goods was consequently greater.

However, McCallum has argued the need to modify the staple approach to economic development, in order to account for the relative lack of industrial development in such major wheat-producing areas as the Prairie provinces, and the considerable economic strength of Quebec, despite the absence of a strong wheat economy there. He proposes a "modified" staple approach that takes into account the significance of *initial endowments* in each region. These endowments include initial population, financial capital, productive capacity, existence of an entrepreneurial class, and political power. The greater the initial endowments a region has, the greater the stimulus given to the local economy by production of the staple. In addition, in the case of Quebec, the strength of its initial endowments helped it appropriate some of the economic linkages from the staple products of other regions, such as Ontario, argues McCallum.

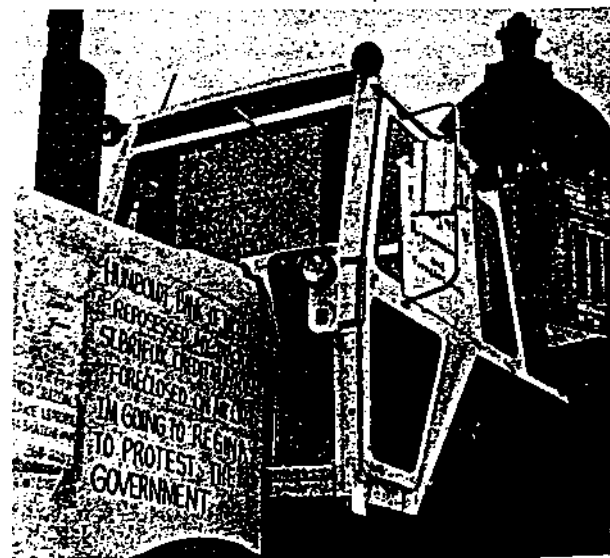
More recent work has extended McCallum's study and argued that industrialization and the stimulus it gave to the growth of urban population served to provide a crucial local or home market for agricultural producers in some regions, notably Ontario

This proved to be crucial in allowing these producers to move beyond a wheat-based economy and make the transition to a mixed farming type of rural economy. In regions where the initial shift to industrial production in the late nineteenth century failed to sustain itself, as in the Maritime provinces, regional agriculture there lacked the expanding local market and basically stagnated (see Winson 1985).

#### Concern with Farm Restructuring

Increasingly, rural sociologists have become preoccupied with the crisis that has characterized agriculture in much of the developed capitalist countries in recent times. Attention has been drawn to the massive *mstructuring* of farming that has occurred in the period after World War II and the negative consequences of this for rural peoples. In both the U.S. and Canada, for instance, farm numbers have dropped precipitously since the mid- to late thirties when farm numbers peaked in both countries. In the U.S., farms declined from almost 7 million in 1935 to approximately 2.6 million in 1978, or approximately 60 percent, while in Canada the 732 832 census farms reported in 1941 had been reduced to 293 089, or 60 percent, by 1986 (Schertz 1979, 13; Statistics Canada 1987, 2). Rural sociologists have been concerned to offer an explanation of these trends.

It has been argued, for example, that one of the most powerful forces behind these changes at the farm level had been the so-called cost-price squeeze—a process in which the increase in the costs of produc-



The cost-price squeeze has caused many Prairie farmers to go bankrupt.

ing a commodity is rising faster than the gross return received by the farmer.

In Canada, as elsewhere, this process was a result of the desire of national governments to keep food price increases to a minimum. Why was this policy pursued? James Wessel argues:

Agricultural surpluses served vital purposes for the urban industrialists, who came to increasingly dominate the economy ... how farm prices helped keep food cheaper for workers in the city, allowing factory owners to keep workers wages low and their own profits high. In addition, the cheap surplus food proved an attractive item on the world market and made it possible to pay for foreign raw materials, and capital goods needed to fuel industrial expansion at home (1983, 17-18).

At the same time, prices of major farm inputs—fertilizers, agro-chemicals, and machinery—were not reg-

ulated and rose constantly as a few powerful corporations came to control the production of these inputs.

The result was that farmers were placed on what could be called the "production treadmill," whereby they had to work harder just to stay in the same place financially. With input prices steadily rising and the prices for their products maintained at low levels, farmers could only maintain their increases by expanding the volume of their output. Typically this was accomplished through the expansion of farm size, and the adoption of mechanical and chemical inputs to allow the farmer to work the larger acreage (see figure 25.1). Between the mid-1950s and 1970s, average farm acreage increased 100 percent in the U.S. and 66 percent in Canada (Schertz 1979, 13; Statistics Canada 1987, 4).

The other main alternative was to resort to off-farm income to counter these unfavourable

Our study shows that one of the components of rural depopulation in Saskatchewan is the shift in the elderly population, which has resulted in a growing percentage of people 65 and over in small towns and villages in the past 15 years. In 1986, elderly people constituted 21.3 percent of the population in towns and villages, whereas provincially they made up only 12.4 percent. The increase in the rural elderly population is one of the factors which produces population growth in some towns and villages and slows population decline in others.

Towns and villages do not have the same capacity to attract elderly people for retirement. Among towns and villages with a population of less than 5 000 people, the ones with a larger population base are more likely to obtain and to retain elderly people over time. This relationship is consistent with previous applications of the central place theory to small towns in the United States. This literature suggests that small towns with a larger

population have more rapid increases in functional diversity and populations than ones with smaller populations. These findings suggest that when elderly people move to small towns for retirement, they are more likely to retire in towns which offer a wider range of services. As small towns increase their elderly populations, they also increase the clientele for services, thus enabling them to further expand their range of services and their volume of retail sales. In this respect, the trend toward the elderly retiring in towns and villages helps to stimulate the service and retail economies of these places. In turn, the economic stimulation produced by the increase in the elderly population creates further employment and attracts more people to the local work force.

Theoretically, our study suggests that the process of rural depopulation involves a concomitant change in the age structure, as the rural elderly people tend to move to small towns and

people tend to migrate to larger urban centers to obtain jobs. Through this process, the elderly population seems to have helped to sustain and to stimulate the economies of small towns. It would appear that the ability of small towns in Saskatchewan to maintain their services and retail businesses at least partly depends on the future growth of the elderly population. If there is a decline in the elderly population in towns and villages in Saskatchewan in the future—a likely development if the current elderly population is not replaced by successive aging cohorts—it could lead to the demise of many small-town economies, even among small towns with relatively large populations.

Source: Adapted from Peter S. Li and Brian MacLean. 1989. 'Changes in the Rural Elderly Population and Their Effects on the Small

Town Economy: The Case of Saskatchewan. 1971-1986, - Rural Sociology 54 (2): 213-26.

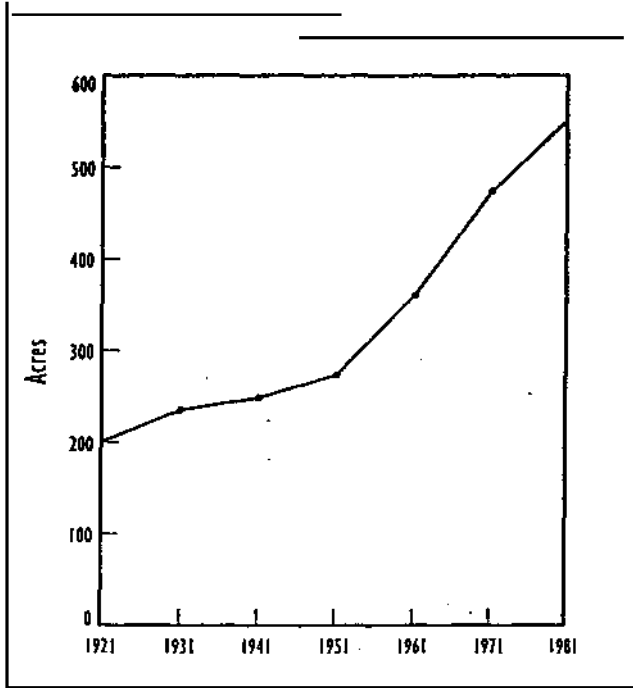


FIGURE 25.1

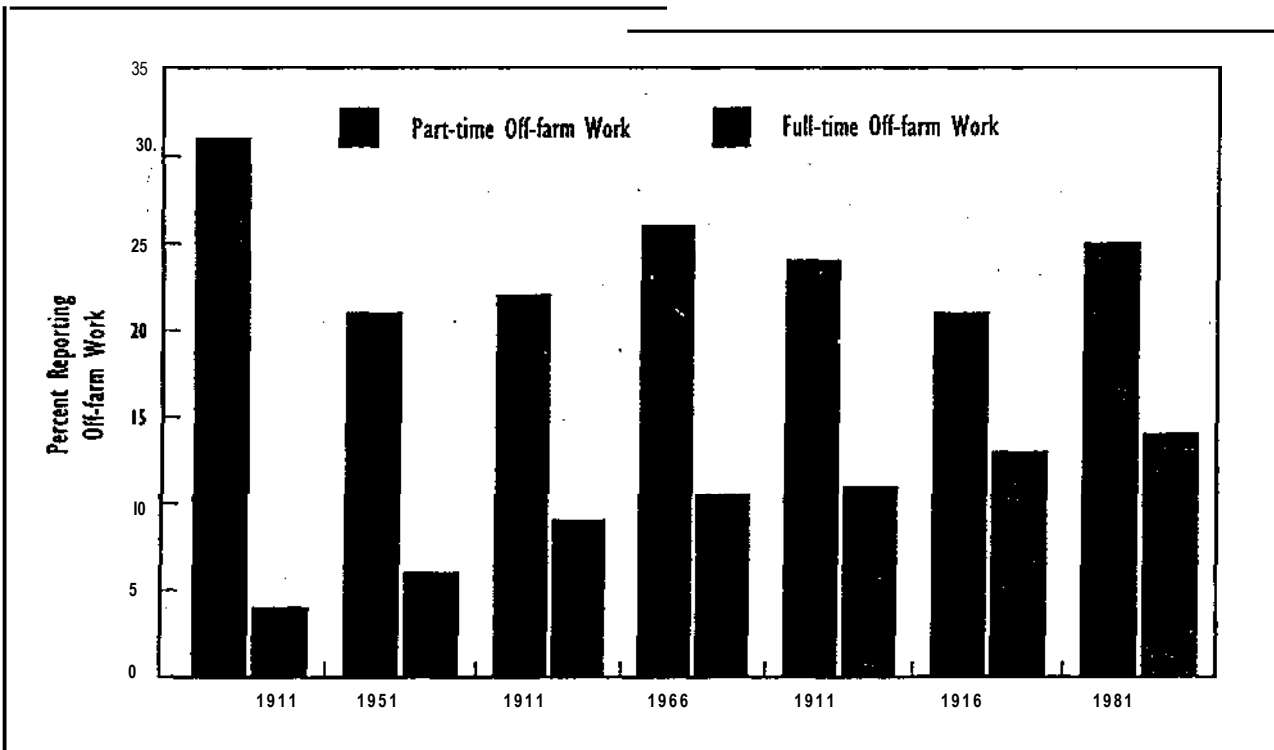
Average Farm Size, Canada, 1921-1982

Source: From various agriculture censuses, Statistics Canada.

is indicated by data on the growth of off-farm work in figure 25.2.

During the 1970s for a relatively short period, strong export markets for wheat, feed grains, and soybeans encouraged those farmers who could to aggressively expand their operations and to specialize in the production of these crops. Relatively good farm prices at this time led many farmers to be persuaded by the banks to take out substantial loans for new land and farm machinery. This was not a problem, as long as farm prices remained relatively high and interest rates on loans relatively low. Unfortunately, this situation ended abruptly in the early 1980s.

In 1981, interest rates rose dramatically and many farmers with substantial mortgages and/or large machinery loans owed to the banks were forced under at this time. During much of the 1980s, farmers had to continue to pay relatively high interest rates, while the prices of a number of important farm commodities stagnated or actually declined. This situation prolonged the farm crisis to the point that the chronic inability of farmers to purchase capital inputs contributed to the failure of major farm implement manufacturers in North America, such as Massey-Ferguson.



It had become clear by the 1980s, however, that the economic opportunities and hard times that have characterized farming in recent decades have not been shared equally. Increasingly, land and capital resources have been concentrated within the farm sector, so that by 1981, 10 percent of farmers in Canada had over 50 percent of all farm sales. Indeed, a mere 2 percent of Canadian farms accounted for 27 percent of gross sales by this date (see figure 25.3).

What this suggests is that the process of *social differentiation* is now quite pronounced in the case of agricultural producers. A small group of "super farms" (sales of \$100 000 and over) already accounts for over one-half of gross annual farm sales, and receives the majority of government price support payments made to farm operators.<sup>15</sup> At the other end of the scale, the smallest 50 percent of all census farms in Canada (sales less than \$25 000) produce a relatively

insignificant 8 percent or so of gross annual sales. What are the social and possibly political implications for society of this polarization of the farming community? Rural sociology has yet to grapple successfully with this question.

#### The Development of the Agro-Food Complex

Increasingly, rural sociologists have looked to broaden the scope of their research, especially where it concerns the understanding of changes in agriculture. For one thing, transformations in recent decades have reduced the economic importance of farming to society compared to other closely related activities. In the United States, for instance, by the early 1970s the net dollar contributions of farm input industries and of firms processing agricultural products was ten times that of farming itself (Goss et al. 1980, 97).

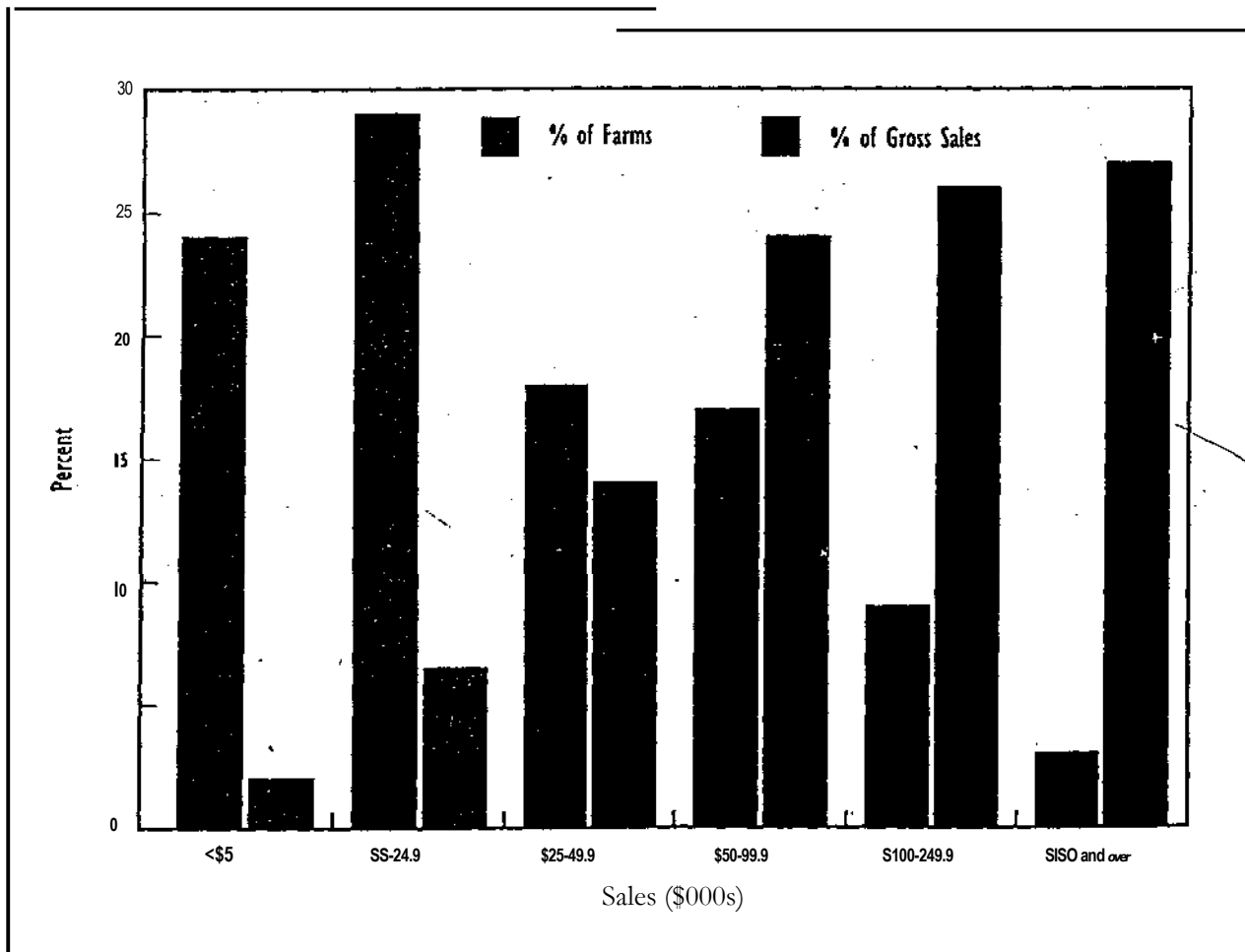
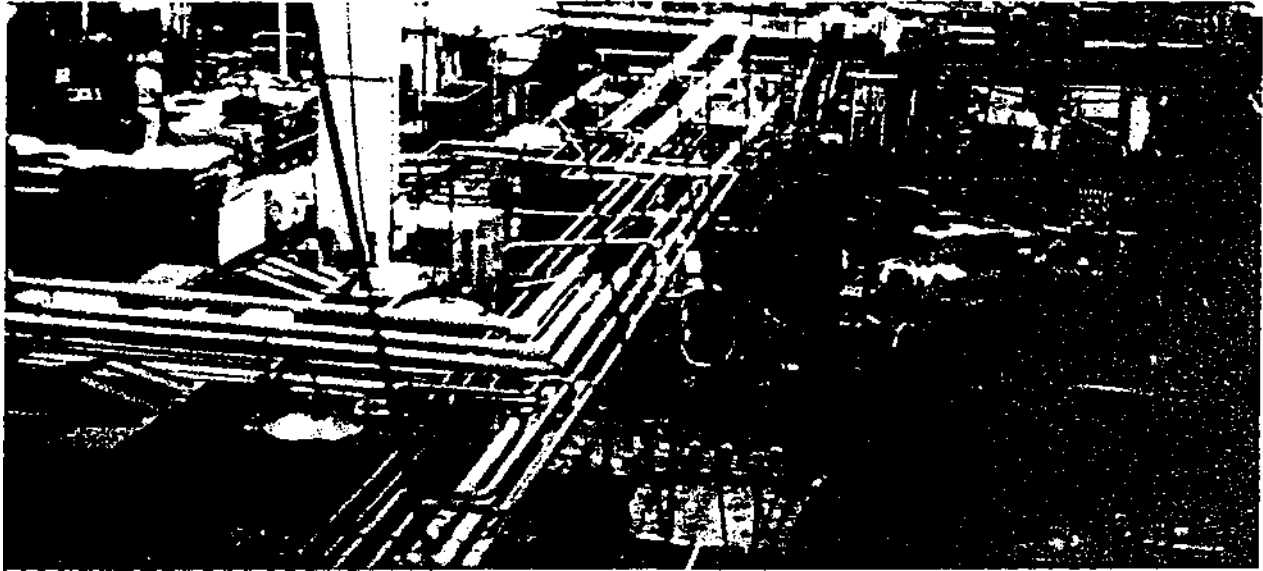


FIGURE 25.3 1981 Census Farms by Amount of Gross Sales in 1980, Canada

Source: Census of agriculture, 1981.



Highly centralized *agribusiness firms*, such as this *large dairy plant*, are now the *dominant* actors in the Canadian *agro-food complex*.

Moreover, the growing degree of integration—and some would argue *dependence*—of farm operators on input suppliers and food processors points to the need for a broader and more systematic approach to rural sociological research. With this in mind rural sociologists have developed the concept of the **agro-food complex** to comprehend the variety of related activities that today comprise the production, processing, and retailing of food and fibre.

As farmers become more and more integrated into this agro-food complex, it becomes increasingly important to examine what the consequences of this might be for them. Rural sociologists have paid particular attention to the *unequal distribution of power* within the agro-food complex and its impact on farm operators.

The power of individual farmers is limited by a number of factors. The economic resources they typically control is insignificant when compared to that of the agribusiness sector, where the leading firms have revenues in the hundreds of millions, or in a few cases, billions, of dollars. Furthermore, as the farm population rapidly declines in numbers, so too does its influence in provincial and federal politics. With increasing specialization, farmers are more and more divided along commodity lines, and with growing social differentiation the economic interests of big farmers and small operators can be expected to diverge.

The power of farmers *may* be enhanced if they have been able to organize strong marketing boards, or if they have established production co-operatives

in place of large corporate input suppliers and processing firms. Nevertheless, not all farmers in all regions of Canada benefit from strong marketing boards or co-operatives. Moreover, the powers of even the strongest marketing boards are limited by wider economic forces, while many co-operative businesses appear to adopt the same priorities as private agribusiness firms in order to compete more profitably in the marketplace."

On the other hand, the considerable merger activity and corporate shakeouts over the last several decades have resulted in a high degree of economic concentration in most agribusiness sectors—input manufacturers, food processing firms, and retail food operations. In a number of cases, the power of agribusiness firms is enhanced through a process of *vertical* integration: The case of the McCain food empire is a good example of this in the Canadian context. This firm is principally a food processing company, but its power, especially in comparison with the farmers who supply it, has been very much enhanced through control of economic activities "upstream" and "downstream" of its processing operations.

Potatoes are grown on McCain land (Valley Farms Ltd.) enriched by McCain fertilizer (McCain Fertilizers Ltd.) using McCain seed (Foreston Seed Co. Ltd.). Harvesting is done with McCain machinery (Thomas Equipment Ltd.) and the harvested potatoes are either stored in McCain facilities (Carlton Cost Storage Co. Ltd.), sent to McCain's plant for processing (McCain Foods Ltd.) or sold

fresh. In the latter case, the potatoes are handled by McCain shippers (McCain Produce Co. Ltd.) which use McCain trucks (Day and Ross Ltd.) to move them to McCain storage facilities (Bayside Potatoport Ltd.) at the point of shipping. The processed potatoes can similarly be moved in McCain trucks (M. & D. Transfer Ltd.) for shipment abroad where one of McCain's sales distribution systems (McCain International Ltd.) handles the marketing (Senopi 1980, 34-5).

Much of McCain's supply, and that of other food processing companies, comes from private farm operators who produce under contract for the processor. Agribusiness firms often prefer this arrangement because farming provides a relatively low return on investment, and is relatively risky because of weather variations, disease, etc. Through a contract arrangement, food processors can dictate to farmers what varieties to plant, when to plant them, what chemical sprays and fertilizers will be used, and exactly when the crop will be harvested. In other words, processing firms can maximize their control over the quality of the raw product they receive, while letting the farm operator bear most of the risks.

One consequence of the integration of farm operations with agribusiness firms, then, has been a further erosion of the independence of the farm sector. A major European study suggests how this has occurred for dairy products there:

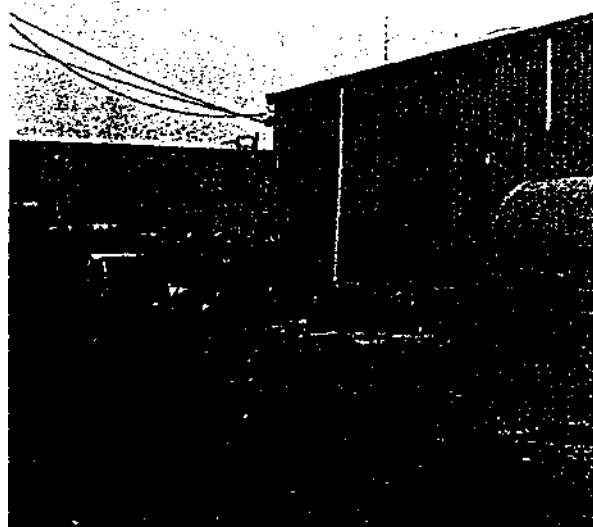
Not only do small and medium-sized producers no longer have a choice regarding the general structure of their farms and production methods, but they are increasingly losing their freedom to decide to whom they sell and on what terms. Producers often find it difficult to change their collecting firm, especially since processing firms are amplifying their network of links with suppliers by providing dairy production plant, animal health aid and technical advice, and even marketing calves.... In short, processing firms are gaining increasingly tight control over dairy production (OECD 1979, 157).

A further consequence of the close relationship between farmers and food processors has been to polarize the farm structure. This was suggested by a recent study in Ontario of fruit and vegetable farms. This study discovered that large food processing firms tend to prefer to deal with the larger and more heavily capitalized farm operators that typically use mechanical harvesting methods. These firms no longer consider it economical to contract with small farmers who often still have their own picked by

hand (Winson 1989). While smaller food processors were much more willing to deal with smaller and medium-sized farms, these firms were being rapidly eliminated by the competitive pressures in the industry. This places the future of small and medium-sized contract farmers in jeopardy.

## The Future of Rural Sociology and Rural Society

The new rural sociology, and the critical perspective it embodies, have insisted on a research agenda that confronts the actual problems transforming the rural reality today. In the future, this will mean broadening further our research to encompass new and pressing issues. Clearly one of these issues is that of rural environment, and specifically how present land use practices, of which agriculture is the most important, are destroying the rural eco-system and contaminating the food we eat. The wonderfully rich topsoils of what were once the natural prairie regions of central Canada represent a resource of incalculable value to the nation, and yet agricultural practices since the turn of the century have caused the loss of much of it, and the growing salinization of the soil that remains. The dependence on the use of agricultural chemicals that has occurred since the Second World War has brought with it dangers of a different kind.



*Reliance on agricultural chemicals in farming has created health hazards for farmers and farm workers and contributed to environmental pollution.*

Pollution of river systems, lakes, and ground water used for drinking by pesticide factories and through run-off from agricultural land is becoming increasingly evident in the populated regions of the country. The contamination of a wide range of foodstuffs produced in Canada by residues of chemical pesticides, a number of which were approved decades ago using standards that today are considered inadequate, has provoked increasing public concern. And while public skepticism over the safety of our food grows, so too does the concern of farm operators who fear that increasing regulation of agricultural / chemicals will impair their ability to compete with / produce imported from abroad.

Irrational and destructive practices are not confined to the agricultural sphere of rural Canada, of course. Our fisheries on both coasts are imperilled. Toxic effluent from the pulp and paper industry has forced closure of much of the British Columbia shellfish industry, while acid rain from urban industry has drastically affected the ability of Atlantic salmon stocks to reproduce in the river systems of the Atlantic provinces. Meanwhile, an expanded offshore trawler fleet with tremendous fishing capacity and utilizing the most sophisticated equipment appears to have seriously affected the size of the fish stocks of the world's richest fishing grounds, the Grand Banks. In the process, the livelihood of inhabitants of hundreds of coastal villages in the Maritimes has been placed in jeopardy (Williams 1987).

Another issue of our time is the complex of practices often referred to as *biotechnology*. As the ability of science in the industrialized world to manipulate genetic material advances, it is also increasingly determining the options for development in the Third World. Biotechnology has the potential, for example, to displace traditional agricultural commodities on a massive scale.

Today corporations in the industrialized world are using biotechnology to develop substitutes for such essential Third World cash crops as vanilla, cocoa, and sugar. While private corporations in North America and Europe stand to profit handsomely from the industrial production of sugar substitutes, for example, it is estimated that the livelihood of 8 to 10 million people in the Third World would be threatened by the loss of their sugar markets and a depression in world sugar prices (Jamal 1988, 7).

Rural sociologists can play a role in helping us to

food complex, by analysing the powerful vested interests that underpin the current destructive and irrational methods of food production and distribution, interests that continue to dictate government policies that jeopardize the welfare of consumers. They can, and some would argue should, use their knowledge to assist those who are attempting to achieve change in this sphere of our society, change that will reverse environmental degradation, enhance the purity of the produce of the land and the sea, and reduce the inequalities and injustices that today characterize the agro-food complex.

## NOTES

- 1) Although we are distinguishing here between the older and the newer rural sociological paradigms, it is important to note that the new rural sociology has many antecedents, particularly in Canada. These will be discussed in terms of the Canadian political economy tradition. However, another important influence on the more critical rural sociology of the 1980s and, presumably, 1990s, is the introduction of "neo-Marxian" and "neoWeberian" elements into rural sociological analysis.
- 2) There are many rural sociologists who do not consider rural sociology to be a subdiscipline of sociology at all. Instead, they would argue that rural sociology is a separate discipline altogether. In order to substantiate that claim they might make an analogy, for example, with the distinctions between economic and agricultural economics, or with economics and home economics. In the U.S., where most rural sociologists were trained, for many years it was mainly those who obtained a Ph.D. degree specifically in rural sociology who were likely to apply to and be hired at American land grant universities (or "agricultural and mechanical" colleges). In Canada, there has never been a Ph.D. program specifically geared to training rural sociologists, although there have been quite a few sociologists interested in various aspects of rural life.
- 3) Cultural anthropology (or social anthropology) was, in turn, mostly concerned with the study of native people in the ethnographic present. That is, in scholarly publications there was more concern with traditional ways of life than with current problems faced by rural native communities.
- 4) Recently (1988), a Canadian author, Dasgupta, has contributed a textbook entitled *Rural Canada: Structure and Change*, which could easily have been subtitled "Structure and Function." It follows a typically structural functionalist approach, in the tradition of American rural sociology.
- 5) The structural functionalist paradigm is summarized by Ritzer (1988, 200-25) and many other authors, hence it is not necessary to repeat the discussion here. However, note that Ritzer argues that conflict theory should be considered a "conflict-based" structural functionalism and not a Marxian conflict theory (1988, 227-39).



- 6) Toennies lived from 1855 to 1936. In addition to the book usually translated as *Community and Society* (1963), which could as easily have been translated as *Communalism and Capitalist Society, i.e., Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* (1887), Toennies also wrote other **less well-known** books, such as *Karl Marx: His life and Teachings*. Toennies name is written 'Fannies' in the original German, the diacritical mark over the "i" is designated in English with 'oe' rather than "o." German nouns should be capitalized. Hence, it should be **Gat**inschaft rather than *gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* rather than *gesellschaft*.
- 7) The dimensions are: homogeneity versus heterogeneity, primariness versus secundariness, and sacredness versus secularity.
- a) Note that the term *ideal type* refers here to a "one-sided accentuation of a phenomenon" or complex set of phenomena. It is analogous to a 'stereotype' except that it does not have any value connotation. Hence, we can have ideal types of phenomena that are not considered to be good," such as the ideal type of criminal or sexual deviant, as well as ideal types of phenomena that are usually evaluated as "good." A complex ideal type is analogous to a model or map of a set of phenomena.
- 9) In modern German the term *Gesellschaft* can have a number of other meanings. For example, a corporation can be a *Gesellschaft*. We are not concerned with such modern usages here since the primary focus of this discussion is to clarify the use and abuse of Toennies' theory within the subdiscipline (or discipline) of rural sociology.
- to) Often the term *ideal type* is used to signify an approach that involves the use of merely analytical polar types like "rural" versus "urban." However, we believe that the original intent behind Max Weber's formulation of the ideal type approach was to develop "historically-based" and cross-cultural "comparative" conceptualizations. Ideal types are not merely pigeon holes that can be filled in at will, they must refer to concrete historical phenomena.
- 1) The recent movie *Field of Dreams* epitomizes the kinds of small town values that we are talking about. Such small town life was satirized by Stephen Leacock, a University of Toronto political economist. See his *Sunshine Sketches*, based on his experience in Orillia, Ontario.
- t2) Germ was a student at the Ecole de la Science Sociale in Paris just after the death of its founder Frederic Le Play (1806-1882).
- t3) The Toronto *Canadian political economy* tradition of scholarship was based on the study of what today is often called economic history, but it also included many sociological and political ramifications. Simply put, a staple is a nonluxury good or a basic commodity that is traded on the international market. Canada's historic staples exports have included beaver pelts, timber, and wheat, today one of Canada's primary nonagricultural staples is gasoline (oil).
- 4) These terms come from British political economy and such writers as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, James Mill, and Jeremy Bentham. They were used by Karl Marx in writing *Capital and Theories of Surplus Value*. They are also implicit in the work of Max Weber. On the notion of mode of production, there is assumed to be a certain degree of correlation (technically, association) between the forces of production and the relations of production.

On the other hand, we are not economic determinists. We do not believe that there is a perfect correlation between the forces of production and the relations of production. Moreover, the relations of production "feed back" onto the forces of production.

Is) Already by 1978 in the United States, it was estimated that the largest 10 percent of farm producers received 50 percent of total commodity program payments made to all U.S. producers (Schertz 1979, 64).

16) For example, if the organization representing apple growers in Ontario insists on selling members apples to apple juice manufacturers at a price the latter considers unreasonable, the juice processors will likely buy fewer local apples and instead buy foreign concentrated apple juice to make up their product.

## QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the major differences between the older structural functional and the newer critical rural sociology approaches to the following topics?
- agriculture and natural resource extraction
  - class factors and rural life
  - forces of production* in Canada and worldwide
  - relations of production* in Canada and the U.S.
  - historical and comparative study
- 2) How do the older and the newer rural sociology approaches differ in their interpretation of the relationship between the theories of Karl Marx and Ferdinand Toennies? Karl Marx and Max Weber?
- 3) What are some of the sociological explanations of rural protest movements? Which explanation do you believe is the most valuable? Why?
- 4) How has the specifically Canadian research tradition of political economy contributed to the newer critical rural sociology? Be sure to discuss some aspects of Harold Innis's theories.
- s) Discuss the contradictory class position of rural petty commodity producers and explain the connotations of the term *family farmer*.

## GLOSSARY

**Agro-food complex** The industrial organization of food production, distribution, and exchange along fully developed capitalist lines. This includes not only the petty commodity producers, but also all organizations and individuals involved in food production, distribution, and exchange (e.g., forward and

**Family farm** An agricultural production unit characteristic of North America. It involves the ownership of land by a family unit. All members of the family unit provide labour for agricultural production.

**Forces of production** The infrastructure that makes economic production, distribution, and exchange possible. It includes the sources of power (e.g., muscle, wind, water, electrical, steam, atomic) and the physical infrastructure that makes it possible to use power (e.g., hydro-electric lines, roads, telecommunications systems). It can also include the technological "software," such as blueprints and knowledge of calculus.

**Gemeinschaft** A precapitalist society. Since many precapitalist societies are characterized by life in small communities with relatively low levels of technology, the term is sometimes translated as "community."

**Gesellschaft** A capitalist society. Since approximately 1450, all Western societies (e.g., Western European nation-states) have been characterized by capitalist factors of production and relations of production. Such capitalist societies are *Gesellschaft* societies. Note that small communities in such societies are also affected by capitalist relations of production.

**Natural resource extraction industries** All industries that are devoted to the extraction of natural resources, such as gasoline, natural gas, metals, and hydro-electric power.

**Petty commodity producer** The general analytical term within a Mandan paradigm for all those producers who are intermediate between precapitalist and fully capitalized relations of production. Most peasants are petty commodity producers. Strictly speaking, a Canadian farmer is a petty commodity producer and a peasant.

**Rural sociology** The subdiscipline of sociology concerned with the study of rural social structure in all of its aspects.

**Social relations of production** The social organizational structure of any capitalist nation-state. The relations of production include all social aspects of society that cause individuals to be directly or indirectly concerned with production, distribution, and/or exchange. Thus, for example, popular culture can be considered an aspect of the relations of production.

**Structural functionalism** A paradigm or school of thought in sociology that emphasized the integrated functioning of all components of a social structure. Generally, structural functionalists have assumed that there is consensus among individuals and subsystems; however, there is also a branch of structural functionalism that does not nec-

essarily assume that there will always be consensus. Sometimes that is referred to as conflict theory.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Bakker, J.I. (ed.). 1990. *The World Food Crisis: Food Security in Comparative Perspective*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press. This edited book has fifteen comparative research articles concerning food security. Two chapters, by Edward Hedin and by Franz Koennicke, concern Canadian native peoples and food security. Even though freedom from hunger is a basic human right recognized by the United Nations, more than a billion people around the world do not have secure access to safe and nutritious food.

Berry, Wendell. 1981. *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural*. San Francisco: North Point Press. Wendell Berry is a poet and a farmer. He tends to romanticize farm life in America. Nevertheless, he also can be highly critical of the agro-food complex. His "Agricultural Journey in Peru," for example, is highly critical of the tendency to rely on a very few seed varieties and species of plants. Berry's prose is poetic and his thoughts are provocative.

Dasgupta, Satadal. 1988. *Rural Canada: Structure and Change*. Lewiston and Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press. This book represents an excellent example of the application of the structural functional paradigm to the study of rural social structure. Dasgupta does a good job of summarizing the older rural sociological perspective. He has published the first rural sociology text exclusively about Canada.

McCallum, John. 1980. *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. McCallum applies the Canadian political economy perspective to the study of the early history of agriculture in Ontario and Quebec. He has done a comparative and historical study of agricultural production, distribution, and exchange in these two regions of Canada, indicating why it was that Ontario gradually outstripped Quebec as a producer of grain for the world market. His explanation of forward and backward linkages is especially informative. The staples approach is central to this well-written book. It is both an introduction to Harold A. Innis and a critique of certain aspects of the traditional Canadian political economy tradition.

Richardson, Jack. 1983. "The Canadian Agricultural Frontier: An Approach to the Theory of

This excellent research study makes it clear that there were structural constraints to economic success experienced by Canadian homesteaders in the Prairies. Richardson gives a clear explanation of Marx's version of the theory of 'ground-rent.' This is a cogent example of the application of Marxian insights to the study of Canadian agricultural history. This entire issue of *the Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* is worth reading. There are informative articles by Gary B. Rush, William Reimer, Daniel Glenday, Harvey Krahn, and John W. Gartrell, as well.

*The Rural Sociologist* 7 (5) (September 1987, Special Issue). This issue contains a symposium on rural life in Canada, with articles from both the structural functional and the critical rural sociological perspectives by David Flynn, David Hay, Lester Settle, Donald Blackburn, Roy Bowles and

Cynthia Johnston, Parvin Ghorayshi, Peter Sinclair, Ellen Wall, Edward Hedican, Frederick Evers, and J.I. (Hans) Bakker. This collection provides a very useful overview to the study of rural Canada.

**Winson, Anthony. 1989.** *Coffee and Democracy in Modern Costa Rica*. Toronto: Between the Lines. %Vinson's analysis provides a critical interpretation of Costa Rica's nonrevolutionary challenge to the dominance of landed elites. He argues that the political and social development of Costa Rica has taken a radically different course from that experienced by other Central American countries. Although Costa Rica developed around an expanding export-oriented coffee economy, the demise of the coffee oligarchy's influence on national politics led to the successful establishment of liberal democracy in a region often dominated by autocratic regimes.