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Social Problems in Rural Areas
under Conditions of Change

Contributions to the International Symposium
in Vologda, September 1991

edited by

A. Andreas Bodenstedt, Stephan Merl and Vladimir A. Nutrikhin

In Kommission bei

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J. I. (HANS) BAKKER

**STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL
DEVELOPMENT: RELEVANCE OF INNIS AND WEBER FOR
RUSSIAN RURAL STUDIES**

I. Introduction

In many respects Russian agriculture today resembles that of an "underdeveloped" country. The great challenge in the years ahead will be for Russia to continue to develop the agricultural sector in a "sustainable" manner (Kidd, 1992). After Stalin Russia made great strides in agricultural production, processing and distribution, but was hampered by rigidly centralized political control and bureaucratic problems. While Russia is not comparable to so-called "third world" countries because there has been a greater degree of modernization, technologization and industrialization, nevertheless there is still a great deal to be done before the structure of Russian agriculture resembles that of Western European countries, the U.S. or Canada. Russia is moving from one type of agricultural structure to another. For example, there is much discussion of the principle of private ownership of farms. But it is not altogether clear what direction rural development should take. It is extremely important to have good theoretical models. Without good understanding of the basic principles involved there will be a great deal of waste. One thing that is clear is that the rural development model that has guided foreign assistance programs in third world countries is not an unambiguously clear model for the path that Russia must follow.

The 1992 United Nations Human Development Report has made it clear that the billions of dollars which have been spent on foreign assistance since the 1960s have not been effective. Poor countries of the third world are worse off today than they were three decades ago. The gap between the rich and the poor, the "North" and the "South," the "developed" and the "underdeveloped" countries has nearly doubled since the early 1960s. All of the social and economic indicators show that there has not been as much progress as there should have been for developing countries to attain a higher standard of living. This is reflected in the on-going problem

of "food security", for example.¹ The general picture is bleak. The world is facing social, political, economic and environmental problems of crisis proportions by the end of the century. One key area that needs to be addressed is the problem of rural agricultural structure. What will the future of agricultural production, processing, exchange and distribution be? How will agriculture change in the core, first world countries? How will development take place in the so-called "peripheral" third world countries? What will happen in the so-called "semiperiphery", including the former Soviet Union?²

Russia, the Ukraine, Estonia and the other new nation-states within the former Soviet Union face significant problems in agriculture and rural development related to (1) social change, (2) institutional reform and (3) constructive work in the decades ahead. The general area of social change concerns the macro-structural issues in society: political, economic, social, cultural and ideological.³ Institutional reform is at the intermediate level and involves changes in social institutions such as the policy, economy, military, kinship, religion, education, mass media, and leisure.⁴ The term

1 See Bakker (1990) for an overview of the problem of food security in developing countries that stresses the variety of questions that need to be addressed and the overall complexity of the problem. The book consists of case studies of specific food security issues in a variety of countries, including Indonesia, Sri Lanka, China, and parts of Africa. It also draws on studies of poor people in sub-regions of the United States and Canada.

2 The terms "core", "semi-periphery", and "periphery" come from "World Systems Analysis". See Hopkins and Wallerstein (1982) and the literature cited therein. The WSA approach has been valuable in many respects, not the least of which was that it led to the conclusion that Russia, Ukraine, Estonia, and so forth were part of the world's capitalist "semi-periphery" in many important respects. That was true even before the breakup of the Soviet Union and is even more true today.

3 A good example is Weber (1982). Much Marxian analysis is also at this level, of course. See Buttel and Newby (1980). Daniel Bell is a conservative writer in this social change tradition; see Bell (1973).

4 See, for example, Gomes (1985), or National Research Council (1990). Pimentel's 1990 article on the "social implications of waste" is a good example of analysis at the level of institutional reform. Pimentel does not question the general direction of social change in the U.S., but he wishes to reform the environmental institutional sphere.

"constructive work" comes from M. K. Gandhi⁵ and concerns specific projects of relatively limited scope, such as the construction of small dams, roads, schools and local infrastructures. Constructive work can also involve less tangible projects such as education or training, literacy campaigns, local food distribution, resettlement, and so forth.⁶

Constructive work can be extremely important, often helping hundreds or even thousands of people in a local area. Institutional reform often benefits tens or even hundreds of thousands of people. Nevertheless, all constructive work and institutional reforms tend to be short term solutions. Short term solutions will help to ameliorate short term problems and will be particularly significant in terms of constructive work and institutional reform activities, but there will have to be a long term vision if the agricultural sector is going to become fully developed. This essay concentrates on macrostructural social change; but, obviously, all three levels of analysis must be addressed and our analysis of social change in general must always take institutional reform and constructive work into account.⁷ Truly sustainable development (Kidd, 1992) will require a long term strategy for social change in agrarian structure.

There are many problems related to constructive work and to institutional reform in Russia today. Those who are most immediately involved in such problems are probably best able to offer solutions. However, what an outsider (with no knowledge of the Russian-language literature on agrarian change) can do is ponder the general situation of social change in Russia and try to make some broad comparisons.

5 Gandhi is an extremely important *sociological* thinker, a fact which is not widely recognized. For a perceptive analysis of the origins of Gandhi's ideas concerning society and social change see Devanesen (1969).

6 Cernea has edited an important book (1991) on sociological and anthropological contributions to "constructive work" for rural development in developing countries. Most development agencies have only recently begun to recognize the important contribution that socio-anthropological work can make. Gandhi, of course, contributed insights at all three levels: social change, institutional reform and constructive work. I prefer the Gandhian term "constructive work" because the term "social work" means something else.

7 For a general analysis of the relevance of Gandhian ideas concerning appropriate levels of technology and development see Bakker (1990b).

The current situation in Russia has often involved solving a series of political crises and such political issues may dominate the agenda for some time to come. The events of the past five years have involved major social change and now it will be necessary to institute reforms and to engage in a great deal of constructive work. But this is also the time to begin to work quietly in the background towards genuine social change in the structure of agriculture. Such social change is a necessary ingredient in rural development.⁸ In order to facilitate genuine rural development in Russia it is vitally important to become acquainted with the structural changes that have taken place as part of the general social change in the agricultural sector in Russia and in other nation-states.⁹ Simplistic analysis of structural changes in agriculture will produce lop-sided solutions that will bring with them many unanticipated problems.

The goals of this paper are three-fold. First, I wish to introduce the Weberian (or, Neo-Weberian) approach to the study of social change in agriculture, with a few illustrative remarks about Weber's analysis of Germany's agrarian structure at the turn of the century (Riesebrodt, 1986). Many people are not even aware that Weber made a contribution to the study of agrarian structure, but recent research has made it clear that his early work was closely related to rural sociological questions (Bakker, 1981; Scaff, 1989). To comprehend Weber's analysis of rural structure it will be necessary to very briefly refer to the situation in Germany at the turn of the century as well. The second goal is to briefly introduce some aspects of Canada's agrarian history. It would be convenient if Weber had written about Canada, but he did not. Therefore

8 The social change aspect concerns macro-structural issues. At that level of analysis there has been a debate among many different interpretations. I tend to support a Neo-Weberian rather than a Neo-Marxian interpretation of social change. See Collins (1986), for a Neo-Weberian interpretation of social change in Russia and the former Soviet Union. For a Neo-Marxian analysis of social change that has been influential in western, industrialized countries see Hamza and Shanin (1982). A good overview of the Marxist approach to social change and the classical Agrarian Question is presented by Mann (1987). I will not attempt to deal in this essay with Chayanov's theoretical contribution, but see Welty (1987).

9 See the excellent summaries by Stephan Merl (1988, 1990). This is the type of literature on social change that I have in mind. While Merl occasionally touches on issues related to institutional reform, he is basically concerned with an overview of the changes that have taken place in the structure of agriculture.

we will have to interpret Weber through Neo-Weberian lenses, particularly as it has been interpreted by the Canadian Political Economy Tradition (CPET) founded by Harold Adams Innis at the University of Toronto in the 1920s. The Innis School has significant overlap with the Weberian approach. While the CPET is well-known in Canada, it is not well-known outside of Canada. Most American rural sociologists, for example, have never heard of H. A. Innis or the CPET. The third goal of this paper is to suggest, in a very preliminary manner an interpretation of some of the basic facts about rural social change and development in Germany and Canada as they pertain to Russia today. The overall purpose of this brief paper is simply to introduce a few basic considerations to the debate on agrarian structures and rural development. The underlying assumption is that the German and Canadian experiences, as interpreted by Weber and by Innis, are relevant to Russia and to other nation-states. But it would be misleading to assume that experience can simply be presented a-theoretically, without any interpretation.¹⁰

II. The Weberian Approach to Agrarian Structure and Social Change

My interpretation of agricultural change and structure is based on a Weberian, or perhaps more accurately a Neo-Weberian, perspective.¹¹ Thus, I have applied Weberian concepts to the study of social change in Indonesia (Bakker, 1988) and other parts of the world (Bakker, 1990a). I first realized that Weber had an important contribution to make to the study of rural sociology when I read the early reviews made by Paul Honigsheim (1946, 1949). I wrote a brief article on "Bringing Weber Back In" (Bakker, 1981) which interested a few graduate students. Since that time the significance of Weber's rural studies has become clearer, in part as a result of the work done by Anthony Oberschall, Keith Tribe, Howard Newby, Tony Winson and others. A very important breakthrough came with Martin Riesebrodt's very important work of editing Weber's report

10 See the Symposium on Rural Canada that appeared in *The Rural Sociologist*, vol. 7, no. 5, edited by Bob Bealer. A variety of Canadian authors are represented. For a general summary from the Structural-Functionalist perspective see Dasgupta, 1988. A good, detailed overview of the Province of Ontario can be found in Fuller (1985).

11 I have also been guided by a Weberian viewpoint in work on other topics, such as the issue of food security (see Bakker, 1990a). I believe that Weber's importance for rural studies has been overlooked. See Bakker (1981, 1987).

on the East Elbian question as part of the Collected Works (Max Weber Gesamtausgabe, 1984).

As stated, I believe that Weberian viewpoint overlaps very well with the less well known "Canadian Political Economy Tradition" (CPET).¹² The overlap is due in part to the fact that both are rooted in the same academic tradition of comparative and historical study of macro structures. In that tradition the political economy of agriculture is an intrinsic aspect of the study of rural development. Rural development requires a comprehensive understanding of the manner in which macro social structures affect micro social structures, and vice versa. The political economy approach, Neo-Weberian and/or Canadian, differs somewhat from the traditional Structural-Functional approach of American rural sociology¹³ and the orthodox Leninist approach of Soviet social science.¹⁴ This is not the place to attempt a thorough exposition of the theoretical perspective that underlies these comments, but it is important for the reader to be aware of the paradigm that is the foundation of my Neo-Weberian approach.¹⁵

12 See Clement and Drache (1978) for an overview up to the late 1970s. Much work has been done in Canada since that time.

13 See Bakker (1989) for a critique of the Structural-Functionalist approach as applied to the Canadian situation. The root of the Structural-Functionalist approach in American rural sociology has been the mis-interpretation of Ferdinand Toennies's notions of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. American Structural-Functional rural sociologists have tended to view that contrast as essentially a comparison of rural small town farming communities and the modern, urbanized society. Actually Toennies was concerned with a contrast between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies.

14 Also interesting in this respect is the Neo-Marxism that was popular among some academics interested in American rural sociology and the rural sociology of the "advanced industrial nations" in the late 1970s. See Buttell and Newby (1980).

15 Not all Canadian scholars will agree with my classification of the CPET as parallel to the Weberian approach. I tend to regard the CPET as practiced in Canada today as very similar to other forms of Neo-Weberian comparative and historical sociology. However, many others would like to make a bigger split between the CPET and Weber. For some that involves claiming the CPET for some brand of Western Marxism or Neo-Marxism, with the implication that Weberian sociology is far removed from Western Marxism or Neo-Marxism.

Essentially, the logic of the method is comparative and historical. Hence, when we consider one labour relationship (e.g. serfdom, free labour) or one commodity in one region at one point in time (e.g. dairy farming in Ontario in the 1990s; wheat production in Saskatchewan in the 1990s; beef production in the Vologda region in the 1960s, etc.) we need to also compare our findings with other times and places (or, "spaces"). No one study (at one time, t_1 , and place, s_1) can provide adequate generalizations about the structure of agriculture. We need a set of times ($t_1, t_2, t_3, \dots, t_n$) and a set of places ($s_1, s_2, s_3, \dots, s_n$) in order to formulate *ideal type generalizations*. Such generalizations can be relatively accurate for a range of different times and places (T_n and S_n), but will be "ideal typical" because they cannot be universally true of all times and places.¹⁶ Comparative and historical analysis is absolutely essential. In order to give a better idea of what I mean I would like to briefly review a few basic facts about the history of German and Canadian agrarian socio-economic and political development in order to make it clearer how the agricultural structure of Canada has changed. It will be evident that within a "free market" and "family farm" capitalist system of agriculture there has been a great deal of variation, both over time and in terms of regions and sub-regions.

There has been a great deal of debate in Western Europe and North America about the extent to which the logic of Weber's approach overlap with the logic of Marx's approach. (Note that I am talking about Karl Marx himself and not "Marxism" or "Neo-Marxism".) There are at least three major opinions. One view is that Marx and Weber are completely different. A second view is that they overlap only to a very limited extent. My own view is the third possibility. I find a great deal of overlap between the logic of the method (i.e. methodology in the broad sense) in Marx and Weber. The only major difference is the extent to which Marx sometimes was more deterministic in his analysis of the effects of the mode of production on the relations of production. What is still valuable and alive in the theories put forward by Karl Marx often overlaps with the contributions made by Max Weber. In fact, Weber can be seen as deepening and

16 See, for example, Weber's essays on methodology as reprinted in Weber (1978). The practical application of this can be found in various parts of Weber's work, including Weber (1946, 1979, 1982).

extending the socio-historical analysis of some of Marx's most significant insights concerning class and class conflict.¹⁷

In any case, it is clear that the young Weber undertook a series of inquiries into agrarian relations throughout history. Weber attempted to establish a typology of agrarian economies. He focused on the historical transformation of agrarian economies. He conceived of historical change as a process of "rationalization" or "development". While Weber rejected any mechanistic theory of stages of development and also rejected any simplistic interpretation of necessary dialectical stages, he did accept the idea that the sixteenth century represents a major transformation in European and World history. Weber rejected the notion of a necessary progression through step-like stages, but he accepted the developmental perspective in socio-historical studies. He viewed development as a process which cannot be predicted in specific countries or regions in terms of historical necessity; but, he retained the notion that it is possible to develop heuristic "ideal types" of historical tendencies. Weber's ideal typical analysis of agrarian social change and development was not just based on an analysis of Germany and Europe. Weber did comparative and historical studies of most of the world, from antiquity to modern times (i.e. the Mediterranean, Russia, the Near East, India, China).

Weber's analysis of agrarian social change began with his first and second Ph.D. theses. But he became well-known as a German academic due to this work on the question of agrarian social change in the Eastern Territories of Germany (i.e. the area east of the Elbe River). Weber examined the question of agrarian labour (*Arbeiterfrage*) as a larger social question. He saw agrarian labour as the foundation of the state and the nation throughout most of human history. A key to the agrarian question, according to Weber, was the impact of seasonal fluctuations in labour demand in agriculture. The question he raised was: "How does a society solve the

17 MacGregor has pointed out that the "communist ideal" in the writings of Hegel and Marx is far different from the actual working out of "Communism" in the Soviet Union. In some respects the differences between Marx and Weber in sociological theory can be viewed as parallel to the differences between Hegel and Kant in philosophy, but that analogy should not be taken too far.

problem of variable requirements for labour in the agrarian economy?"¹⁸ Weber developed a typology of agrarian socioeconomic systems. The typology consists of a set of "ideal types": slave, colonial, patriarchal and capitalist. The ideal types are set up in order to analyse historical knowledge of specific regions and sub-regions in terms of local peculiarities and tendencies. Weber was concerned with the internal dynamics of societies and he used his typology to provide a heuristic tool for comparative and historical analysis of sociological questions.

The situation found in most non-capitalist countries of the world today can be analysed in terms of Weber's ideal type of "patrimonial" socio-economic and political systems.¹⁹ Of course, what matters most is not the *name* that is used to identify the ideal type, but the comparative and historical analysis of social characteristics of such types. Thus, for example, it might be possible to consider the heuristic value of Karl Marx's concept of the "Asiatic Mode of Production" as an ideal type which is very similar to Weber's ideal type of "patrimonial prebendal" socio-economic and political systems. Be that as it may, the significant fact is that the analysis of agrarian structures requires analysis of the structural social change that takes place in such aspects of production, processing, exchange and distribution as the structure of labour. What type of enterprise is encouraged in a society? How is that socio-economic and political form of enterprise organized in terms of the allocation of labour? How is labour rewarded? How are problems of labour-relations dealt with? What is the basis of social stratification? Is it "slavery," some other kind of "unfree labour" or formally "free labour"? The process that Weber examined in Germany in

18 The excellent analysis by Scaff (1989) provides a convenient summary of recent reinterpretations of Weber that have been carried out by European and American sociologists interested in the early Weber. See Bakker (1981). Note that Emile Durkheim, the other great founder of sociology, was never involved in the study of agrarian social change in any significant way. See Lukes, 1985.

19 Scaff (1989: 49-59) uses the term "patriarchal," which can also be found in Weber's writings, particularly his early work on agrarian structures. However, I believe that the important term "patrimonial" is more inclusive. It allows us to use the analysis of the ideal types of "patrimonial-prebendal" and "patrimonial-feudal" socio-economic and political systems found in Weber's *Economy and Society (Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, or, more correctly, Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte)*. For an application of Weber's "patrimonial prebendalism" to the case of pre-colonial and colonial Java see Bakker (1988). I believe that the patrimonial prebendal ideal type is also relevant for the analysis of Russia.

the Eastern Territories was a process of change in the material and social circumstances of labour on the large estates.

The problem in Germany at the turn of the century was that the socio-economic structure was not in harmony with the political structure. Germany was a unified nationstate (and had been since 1870); but, the western part of Germany was industrializing and emphasized "free labour" while the eastern part was still agrarian and emphasized a form of "unfree labour". The system of small holdings in the western part of Germany (e.g. the Rhineland areas where Marx was born) contrasted sharply with the system of large estates run by the Junker landlords in the eastern part (e.g. in Prussia). Empirical social research showed the details of those and other differences and Weber provided a theoretically sophisticated set of ideal typical categories for the interpretation of the problem.²⁰

A complete analysis of the transition from "Prebendalism" or "Feudalism" to "Capitalism" in different regions and sub-regions of Europe during the long historical period of transition from approximately the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries is necessary in order to fully comprehend all aspects of agrarian social change, but it is not always necessary to refer to all aspects of that immense set of historical questions in order to be able to understand particular circumstances more fully. It is important for us to understand what was characteristic of "Feudalism" in general and in terms of agrarian relations. Such authors as Bloch (1940) and Homans (1941) have provided important analyses. Hartley (1979) has given a very vivid picture of "country life" in medieval England. But it is also possible to get lost in the detailed study of "Feudalism" and lose track of the important differences between "Feudalism" and "Prebendalism" or "Feudalism" and "Capitalism." Simple introductory books like Ganshof (1964), Zacour (1969) and Hollister (1974) are often sufficient to provide a general overview, especially for teaching purposes.

20 See Oberschall (1965) for an excellent overview of the research that was done on the agrarian question and the agrarian labour question in Germany. Oberschall was one of the first to indicate Max Weber's concern with this, and other, empirical questions. Hence, the image of Weber as nothing but an armchair scholar was somewhat diminished by Oberschall's careful work. Also see Scaff's excellent overview (1989: Chapter II).

One very important contribution made by Weber's comparative approach is his emphasis on the rich variety of different situations and types of structures. While aware of the vast complexity of human history, Weber nevertheless is able to sort out key factors which have enormous heuristic, explanatory value. In his analysis of Germany's agrarian situation at the turn of the century it was his emphasis on the labour question that helped clarify many aspects of the question that had previously been obscure. He analysed the Eastern Territories (i.e. East of the Elbe River) in Germany as basically a "Patriarchal" or "Patrimonial Feudal" agrarian structure. At the same time, however, he did not posit one universal evolutionary path that all nation-states must travel in order to become developed into technologically advanced countries. He also looked at colonial situations, such as the agrarian structure of nineteenth century Argentina.²¹

III. Historical Background to Agrarian Structure and Social Change in Canada

Weber never wrote about Canada. Nevertheless, if we turn to the study of Canada's agrarian socio-economic and political history we find a scholar who was working along much the same lines. Harold Innis, as mentioned, took a comparative and historical view of Canada's development. This is not the place to review all of Canadian social and economic history, but we can point out a few basic facts. For more detailed and comprehensive analyses see Fowke (1946), Wilson (1978) and Wood (1924).

Canada, as a former British colony, was tied to Great Britain to a large extent, especially until World War II. Most economic links were with Britain, but there were also significant links with the United States. Harold Adams Innis, an economic historian at the University of Toronto, stressed the importance of the export of basic *staple* commodities for the understanding of Canadian social, political, cultural and agricultural history. Such staples included: cod fish, timber, beaver pelts, grain (wheat and other cereals and corns), and - especially since World War II - petroleum. These staples represent separate, overlapping waves of struc-

21 Scaff (1989: 53-55) calls our attention to Weber's brief remarks on Argentina and summarizes Weber's classification of Argentina as a colonial agrarian economy characterized by freehold land and free labour. See Weber (1894a, 1894b).

tural change in the colonial and postcolonial export of raw materials. Agricultural production was extremely important to the formation of Canada's current economy. The period of the wheat staple lasted perhaps longer than any other (circa 1820-1920) and had a crucial, formative influence. Grain exports dominated the economic development of Ontario, especially in the early nineteenth century (circa 1820-1860). The grain staple then moved west to the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. British colonial policy encouraged settlement by grain farmers at the turn of the century (the 1900s) and expressly discouraged beef ranchers and other forms of livestock production. In the 1900s Saskatchewan family farmers on 160 acre homesteads competed against one another on a colonial (not an entirely "free") market. They helped to supply British industrial workers with grain for bread, beer and fodder. Agricultural production played a significant role in industrialization in Ontario, especially because it helped provide capital and infrastructure. But it did not have the same effect in "the Prairies" (i.e. Manitoba and Saskatchewan).²²

Of course, H. A. Innis was not the only scholar to contribute to the Canadian Political Economy Tradition. Many others at the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto contributed to the study of the impact of staples on Canada's historical development, including Adam Shortt, O. D. Skelton, A. R. M. Lower and R. M. Dawson.²³ Nevertheless, the lead was taken by Harold Innis. In a series of books he argued that the conclusions of classical political economy cannot be taken at face value because economic conditions are different in peripheral or colonial economies. The main source of difference, Innis argued, is that the colonies

22 The province of Alberta is a separate case, due to the U.S. influence. There was much more beef ranching in Alberta and wheat production did not have the same central role that it did in Saskatchewan. Since World War II the importance of oil and natural gas deposits in Alberta has again made that province somewhat of an exception to generalizations that one might wish to make about the Prairies.

23 As a student at the University of Toronto Department of Sociology I had the opportunity to learn about the Canadian Political Economy tradition from Professor S. D. Clark. Clark continued the tradition in a number of important books (e.g. Clark, 1976).

are dependent on the sale of staple commodities to the imperial power.²⁴

An example of the use of Innis' approach is the export of wheat from Ontario and Quebec in the nineteenth century. John McCallum (1980) has summarized the staples approach as it applies to Canada. He compares mid-century Ontario with Quebec. Ontario wheat and flour exports rose dramatically around 1840 and peaked in the 1850s and 1860s, while Quebec wheat and flour production declined after the 1830s. The capital accumulated by "family farm" type peasant simple commodity producers provided the basis for capitalization of the means of production and greater differentiation of classes. In the urbanizing system of Southern Ontario class differentiation resulted in the rise of an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie in the towns and cities. Towns prospered. Industrial production was initiated. However, while Ontario prospered due to its staples base, Quebec suffered. It had no significant new staple base of its own. Gradually the initial endowments of the Quebec corridor gave way to the advantage enjoyed by Ontario entrepreneurs. McCallum modifies Innis' approach to provide a nuanced understanding of nineteenth century agriculture in Canada. The Canadian Political Economy approach is not mechanistic or deterministic, but it does emphasize the importance of an economic base. The economic base, however, is not always production pure and simple. It includes the Modes of Production, Processing, Exchange and Distribution, in all of their complex aspects and inter-relationships.

The wheat trade that characterized Ontario in the nineteenth century eventually moved further west, to Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In the early decades of this century the Prairies were a "breadbasket" for the world. Ontario agriculture became more specialized and less dependent on the wheat staple. It is extremely important to note that the family farms of the Prairies were based on a homesteading system that made farmers highly competitive with one another. Those who were not able to start farming on enough land were not able to benefit from "ground rent" and therefore were not able to do much more than subsist. In the long run the

24 Innis' argument is similar to that of the Dutch Indonesian scholar Julius Herman Boeke, who originated the notion of a "dual economy". Boeke was criticized by many dependency theorists in the 1960s, but the concept of dualism in political economy is still important for analysis of conditions in peripheral and semi-peripheral regions.

prosperous farmers were the ones who were able to benefit from the added value of their land as a form of capital (Richardson, 1983).

IV. Canada's Agrarian Structure in the 1990s

Today, while Ontario is a relatively prosperous agricultural and industrial region, Saskatchewan has experienced a serious economic decline. Even in Ontario there has been a general decline in the agricultural sector in terms of the diversity of commodities that can be produced at a profit. All over Canada there has been a significant general decrease in the number of family farms. The number of farms has decreased steadily, even though the total farm land under cultivation has remained fairly steady. Individual family farms tend to be larger, more technologized and based on use (though usually not ownership) of more acreage. In order for a family farm operation to be competitive in today's market situation in Canada it is often necessary to be highly specialized. Some family farmers are specialized in the production of only one commodity. Others have only two or three commodities, some of which may be integrated (e.g. corn and pigs). More and more family farms are becoming "agro-business enterprises". The general tendency is for capitalist agriculture to replace simple commodity production and the old style family farms.

While family farmers once constituted the bulk of the population of Canada, they now only constitute less than four per cent of the workforce. Ontario has many farms, but farmers represent only 2.6 per cent of the workforce in Ontario. Hence, we are rapidly reaching a situation where the sustainability of the family farm becomes a very real issue. It will require government policy to encourage the small percentage of the population still engaged in agriculture to remain in agriculture. Since many of today's family farmers, in Ontario and the other provinces, are older people, it will be important to continue to attract younger people into farming. Currently most sons and daughters of farmers are choosing to work in other sectors. Many are going on to higher education and working in urban occupations. Many students from farm backgrounds believe that there is "no future in farming". Those who do go into farming today know that they need many business skills. Many of today's successful farmers in Canada are university graduates who approach their work in anything but a traditional manner.

A good overview of the situation in Canada can be obtained from the *Canada Year Book* series. For example, the 1990 *Canada Year Book* states: "Today perhaps three or four Canadian families out of every 100 is a farming family. In 1885, when the first Canadian transcontinental rail line was completed, 60 families out of every 100 were farm families and the agricultural settlement of the West, and even of major areas of Eastern Canada, was only starting ... The Census year showing the peak number of farms was 1941, with 733,000 farms. In 1981, the number of farms was 318,361, yet the volume of agricultural production was about 175 per cent greater in 1981 than in 1941. In 1986, there were 293,089 Census-farms... The increase in farm size and reduction of farm numbers has continued... Specialization in farming has become more and more characteristic of the industry" (Statistics Canada, 1990: 9-1). The statistical evidence shows that while farm cash receipts have increased, operating expenses (including depreciation charges) have also increased; but, due to government policies, *realized* net income has remained fairly even (Chart 9.5 and text for the period 1977-1987 in Statistics Canada, 1990: 913).²⁵ (Statistics Canada regularly publishes information on agriculture, including summaries of the Agriculture Census.)

This aspect of the structure of agriculture has to be well understood. The transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies has been a relatively long period of adjustment, particularly in agricultural production. The colonial and frontier background to the North American situation has to be kept in mind. The "family farm" can be viewed as a transitional phenomenon. The family farm is *not* indicative of fully-fledged capitalism. It is more peculiar to the transitional phase in hinterland and colonial areas, like the Central and Western American frontier and the Prairie frontier in Canada. In the nineteenth century Ontario was the frontier and family farming was the basis of exchange. Eventually, however, the frontier moved further west and the family farm gave way more and more to the agro-business enterprise. The general tendency is for fully capitalized

25 There are many federal services provided to farms, including the Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act (FIMCLA of February, 1988) and The Farm Credit Corporation (FCC). There are also important provincial services, such as the Ontario Ministry for Agriculture and Food's (OMAF) financial assistance programs and five agricultural technology colleges.

agro-business production to replace simple commodity production of the sort represented by the traditional family farm. That is why it is strange to see many in Russia advocate the adoption of the "private farm" as a vehicle for promoting capitalism. North American agriculture has become more and more capital intensive, increasing the dependency of family farms and increasing the likelihood of farm bankruptcies. The extent to which family farms are not corporate businesses they represent a historical anachronism, the continuation of a type of productive activity that is basically transitional. Giangrande (1985), Wilford (1985), Kneen (1989) and others have pointed to problems such as farm bankruptcies and increased concentration of ownership that constitute a "crisis" in Canadian farming. The Free Trade agreement between the U.S. and Canada (and possibly Mexico) will have a significant impact on some agricultural commodities. The situation is complex and far from ideal. According to authors like Gren and Sutcliffe (1987), the capitalist "profit system" has significant structural weaknesses. Yet, very little comparative analysis of the structure of agriculture has been done by agricultural economists and rural sociologists in the last few decades. The direction research has taken has been away from a Neo-Weberian paradigm. Similarly, even in Canada, with the exception of a handful of scholars, there has not been a significant continuation and extension of the CPET, especially in either its Neo-Marxian or Neo-Weberian guises.²⁶

V. Commodity-specific Research

Since World War II most research on agriculture has been "commodity-specific." That is, there is relatively little detailed research on agricultural production that attempts to evaluate the structure of agriculture as a whole. There are good practical reasons for limiting oneself to the study of a particular commodity, but there are also disadvantages. As family farms have become more specialized and as farmers' associations have become

26 Bibliography is presented by Clement and Drache (1978). Most of those who have worked in either the Neo-Marxian or Neo-Weberian versions of the CPET have tended to restrict their comparisons to regions and sub-regions within Canada, such as McCallum's comparison of nineteenth century Quebec and Ontario. However, exceptions to the rule include Winson (1989), Schryer (1990), Allahar (1989), Bakker (1990), and a few others, who have looked at Costa Rica, Mexico, Latin America and Indonesia.

more commodity-specific as well, such a research strategy tends to make sense. Hence, while some researchers concentrate on the beef (or, "red meat") sector, others pay attention only to chickens (or, "feathers"). Production of tomatoes is viewed as quite different from production of grapes, and so forth.

My own commodity-specific interest is in the organizational structure of the dairy industry in Ontario. The dairy industry is characterized by price controls and a system of "supply management". The supply of dairy products is strictly controlled in order to insure that prices will remain stable and that the family farm enterprise can plan ahead with a good projection of costs and profits. The system of quotas and prices has been a highly successful way of ameliorating some of the negative side effects of cut-throat competition. Dairy products are of a uniformly high quality and prices are stable. Ontario consumers can buy milk, butter, cheese and other dairy products (e.g. cream, buttermilk, ice cream, etc.) everywhere at relatively stable prices, with very little sub-regional variation. It would be unthinkable in Ontario to have to stand in a long line to buy milk! We have retail outlets (i.e. so-called variety stores or "convenience stores") very near most urban neighbourhoods.

The negative aspect of Ontario's system of supply management is that we pay more for milk than our American neighbours to the south. For example, milk prices in Ontario are considerably higher than milk prices in New York state. In part the price difference can be accounted for by harsher climatic conditions in Canada. The exact nature of the differences is an extremely interesting topic for research. There are many regional and sub-regional differences within Canada and within the U.S. Therefore, it is very difficult to generalize.

Nevertheless, in all of North America the general trend is a movement away from the traditional nineteenth century family farm and toward a new "agro-business enterprise" model. Today's farmers are businessmen. They constitute a type of "petite bourgeoisie". Production has increased both in terms of farming units and even in terms of cows! (Production per cow, somewhat surprisingly, has continued to improve.) Most farming units have advanced technology for milking, feeding, and preliminary processing. Good refrigeration systems are the rule.

The positive aspects of dairy production are repeated for other agricultural products as well. Other agricultural products are in similar abundance in markets, supermarkets, and corner variety stores. However, the positive side of the picture must be balanced by a more structural analysis of agriculture relative to other sectors in the economy. The political economy of agriculture perspective can be brought to bear on the subject as well. When we move away from a purely descriptive, commodity-specific approach to a political economy approach that tries to evaluate the overall situation, then we get a somewhat different picture. For example, an increasing portion of the cost of agricultural commodities has gone to processing. Farmers have not been increasing prices; their rate of return has, in many situations, remained steady or even decreased. Consumers are often angry at farmers because they do not realize that the large profits do not go to the producers but to the processors and distributors. Concentration of control in the food industry is a significant topic for research, but awareness of such concentration often requires moving beyond a vertically-based study of one commodity. The structure of agriculture as a whole can only be adequately understood through a comprehensive study of horizontal linkages.

VI. Toward the 21st Century

Of course, research on specific commodities does not add up to a comprehensive picture of social structure or social change. As long as individual researchers study only the vertical dimension of specific commodities then it is unlikely the knowledge about agriculture will be linked theoretically. A methodological approach that is somewhat broader than that which is usually employed by many empirically-orientated rural sociologists and agricultural economists is necessary. Economic history and comparative analysis is extremely important for a broader, structural approach that examines the horizontal, as well as the vertical, linkages.

Thus, in addition to my empirical interest in research on specific commodity groups (like the dairy industry), I am also concerned with broader, structural questions. The political economy perspective, which utilized economic and social history, is central to a Canadian Political Economy approach. A judicious use of sample surveys of various kinds is useful. For example, it is useful to sample public opinion. It is also useful to have survey data of various kinds of farmer attitudes. However, the sample

survey approach is not sufficient, in and of itself, to provide us with an accurate account of the general structural situation. At its worst, survey research can degenerate into mere "abstracted empiricism".²⁷ Much of the work that was done by rural sociologists in the U.S. and Canada in the 1950s and 1960s was simply a-theoretical research generating much descriptive statistical information.

As valuable as such information can be, when used properly, it is also very misleading if not placed into a broader framework. In this brief summary I have tried to make it clear that the structure of agriculture in North America is far more complex than some Russian agriculturalists now assume. The Canadian Political Economy Tradition is one theoretical contribution to better understanding of some of the key issues. It can also be compared to the broader Neo-Weberian perspective. The essential similarity between Innis and Weber is an emphasis on comparative and historical analysis.

Some research topics which will continue to be important are: (1) regional and subregional differences in agricultural structures, (2) decline of the family farm as a petite bourgeois form of ownership, (3) decline in farm labour and increases in rural non-farm populations, (4) shifts in the importance of difference staples over time, (5) declines of small town rural populations, (6) long term trends in agricultural employment for both family farmers and agricultural labourers, and (7) commodity-specific variations in production, processing, exchange and distribution systems. In analysis of problems of this type it will be especially important for Canadian researchers to pay attention to differences and similarities between Quebec and the rest of Canada.²⁸ Such specific research questions should be approached from a comparative and historical perspective that emphasizes the importance of structures and processes.

27 This is the term used by C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), Chapter 3. He views "abstracted empiricism" and "grand theory" as distortions which lie at opposite ends of a continuum.

28 See, for example, the excellent article by Reimer (1983) on farm labour in Quebec. The Province of Quebec is a political entity which is defined by Confederation. If Quebec's National Assembly chooses to separate from the rest of Canada then the borders of a semi-independent, sovereign Quebec will be subject to dispute. Much of what now constitutes the Province is valuable for natural resources but with a low density population of aboriginal (Inuit and Indian) peoples. The Native People of Quebec are likely to choose to remain with the rest of Canada, if given a choice.

All of this should make it clear that while Russian scholars can benefit from Western European and North American contributions to the study of agrarian structures and agrarian social change, there are important theoretical and methodological differences within "western" countries. I have argued in favour of a Neo-Weberian theoretical and methodological position and have also argued that the CPET can be included within the Neo-Weberian fold; but, not all Canadian sociologists would agree! Many American rural sociologists still basically follow structural-functional assumptions that can be traced back to Talcott Parsons (1960) and Robert K. Merton (1968). The "community study" tradition in sociology is also still quite important (e.g. Vidich and Bensman, 1958, for a classic study in this genre). Thus, for example, the textbook by Rogers et al. (1988) continues to be widely read but emphasizes structural-functional and "community studies" approaches. Such work is valuable, but it is far different from the paradigm that I am emphasizing here. I believe that to a large extent American rural sociology suffers from a continued mis-interpretation of the classical theories of Ferdinand Toennies (1963, 1974a, 1974b). But that argument would require another paper!

There are important paradigmatic differences within sociology, rural sociology, social anthropology and related disciplines (e.g. Lett, 1987). Some Canadian researchers have emphasized the importance of gender and sex role issues in the study of "farming" and "community" (e.g. Ireland, 1983; Illich, 1982). There is also a strong community studies tradition in Canada, dating back to Symbolic Interactionist interpretations (Miner, 1939). But there are a number of researchers in Canada working within the Neo-Weberian framework (loosely defined), including some who may not themselves favour being identified as "Weberians" (e.g. Richardson, 1983; Reimer, 1983; Schryer, 1990; Sinclair, 1985; Bakker, 1990). There is much that a Neo-Weberian structural approach to agrarian social change can offer toward the further analysis of Russia's agricultural problems.

This brief paper can only touch on many of the important issues that need to be tackled in order to undertake a Neo-Weberian analysis of agrarian structures and social change, much less institutional reform and constructive work. I have tried to make it clear that Weber's ideal typical comparative and historical approach has much to offer. I have also tried to introduce the Canadian Political Economy Tradition of Harold Adams Innis and give a bit of a picture of Canada's unique, frontier colonial staples

history. I have particularly emphasized the idea that the "family farm" as known in North America is a result of unique historical circumstances. The implication is that Russian researchers will have to carefully assess the relevance of the family farm model for the emerging private farm system many would like to create. It clearly is not just a matter of free markets and free labour, tout court.

I hope that this brief overview will provide a stimulus for more exchange of opinions and for collaborative research. I would be particularly pleased if Russian scholars would examine the question of ways in which Weber's "patriarchal" or "patrimonial" ideal type is relevant for understanding long-term historical trends in Russia (Compare Riesebrodt, 1986, for Germany; and Bakker, 1988, for Java). But I would also like to see collaborative research on other issues enumerated, such as commodity-specific research for particular regions (e.g. the dairy industry in the St. Petersburg metropolitan area; vegetable production in Vologda Region, etc.) as long as such research endeavors are framed within an understanding of broader structural issues of social change in agrarian socio-economic and cultural systems.

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