



DOI: 10.22363/2313-2272-2017-17-1-7-18

## POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AGRARIAN CHANGE: SOME KEY CONCEPTS AND QUESTIONS\*

H. Bernstein

University of London,  
Senate House, Malet St., London WC1E 7HU, UK  
(e-mail: henrybernstein@hotmail.co.uk)

**Abstract.** This paper draws on lectures given in recent years at the China Agricultural University, on author's book *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change* [1] and on a recent article [3]. The author supplied as few references as possible to very large literature in English on agrarian change both historical and contemporary; there is an ample bibliography in [1], which is expanded in [2–5]. The paper outlines in schematic fashion some key concepts in the political economy of agrarian change with special reference to capitalism historically and today; some key questions posed by the political economy of agrarian change, and how it seeks to investigate and answer them; two sets of more specific questions about agrarian transition to capitalism and agrarian change within capitalism (internal to the countryside, bringing in rural-urban interconnections, pointing towards the place of agriculture within larger 'national' economies, and concerning the character and effects of the capitalist world economy). With the aid of the last group of questions, the author discusses three themes, which they are deployed to investigate: the agrarian origins of capitalism, the distinction between farming and agriculture generated by capitalism, and the fate(s) of peasant farmers in the modern world of capitalism. The author believes that one cannot conceive the emergence and functioning of agriculture in modern capitalism without the centrality and configurations of new sets of dynamics linking agriculture and industry, and the rural and urban, and the local, national and global. The three themes all feed into the fourth and final theme, that of investigating the fate(s) of the peasantry in capitalism today, which resonates longstanding debates of the 'disappearance' or 'persistence' of the peasantry, albeit now in the conditions of contemporary 'globalization'. The author does not deny some of the critique of the contemporary globalization, or at least its effects; his problem is the advocacy of 'solutions' premised on an unconvincing, pre-given and idealized 'peasant way' that lacks the analytical means (and desire) to confront processes of class formation in the countryside.

**Key words:** political economy; agrarian change; agriculture and industry; capitalism; peasantry; globalization; class formation

This paper outlines, in schematic fashion, some key concepts in the political economy of agrarian change with special reference to capitalism historically and today. It also indicates some of the key questions posed by the political economy of agrarian change, and how it seeks to investigate and answer them. By political economy I mean the field of social relations and processes/dynamics of production and reproduction. Applied to some types of society, and notably capitalist societies, the foundational, although not

---

\* © H. Bernstein, 2016.

exclusive, element for political economy is class relations and dynamics of production and reproduction.

The concerns of political economy can be summarized in four questions concerning social relations of property and production, divisions of labor, distribution of the product of labor, and its uses in reproduction. Those four questions are: Who owns what? Who does what? Who gets what? What do they do with it? As these are analytical questions they can be applied across different sites and scales of social reality from individual farming households through village, local and national socioeconomic units of investigation to the world economy. What is distinctive about political economy as a theoretical framework and approach is its recognition that everything that is produced must be *reproduced*, including the producers on a daily and generational basis. The divisions by use of the social product can be distinguished, following Eric Wolf [15], as: a consumption fund; a replacement fund; a ceremonial fund; and, in the case of class societies, a fund of ‘rent’.

This can be illustrated very briefly in relation to three types of society, using a ‘mode of production’ framework. The first type is ‘subsistence’ societies which reproduce themselves at constant levels of consumption and typically generational reproduction (hence population size) as well (Table 1).

Table 1

‘Subsistence’ societies: a simple schema

Key questions		Social differentiation
Who owns what?	Land = ‘common property’ (and often used nomadically)	—
Who does what?	→	Social divisions of labour by gender (and generation)
Who gets what?	Egalitarian distribution	Qualified by gender and generation
<b>What do they do with it?</b>		
Consumption	Simple reproduction	Some effects of gender and generational differentiation
Replacement	Minimal (simple tools and weapons) + daily and generational reproduction	Some effects of gender and generational differentiation
Ceremonial	Can be large in relation to total social product	Often strong gender differences in complex rituals and other cultural practices

The second ‘type’ is agrarian class societies which emerged and developed from the rise of settled farming some 12,000 years ago. They occupy most of the recorded history and include the great agrarian civilizations of the past, but, for all the achievements of those civilizations, their class relations and dynamics generated no systematic or sustained development of the productive forces. Only with the advent of capitalism do we see ‘a process of self-sustaining economic development characterized by rising labour productivity in farming’ [6. P. 171]. Key characteristics of agrarian class societies are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

**Agrarian class societies: a simple schema**

Key questions	Peasants (classes of labour)	Lords ('plus' officials including military chiefs; tax collectors; merchants; priests)
Who owns what?	Instruments of labour	Land and appropriation of labour through rents, taxes, merchants' profit, etc. (and gendered property rights)
Who does what?	Work (including gendered divisions of labour)	Exploit and rule (including gendered rules of authority and succession)
Who gets what?	'Necessary product' (for simple reproduction)	'Surplus product' = fund of rent
<b>What do they do with it?</b>		
Consumption	(minimal) Simple reproduction	Expanded reproduction of wealth and power (including gendered rules of inheritance) ↓
Replacement	Objects and instruments of labour + generational reproduction	Expansion of wealth and power, including military spending
Ceremonial	Community and family rites of passage, etc. (sometimes patronised by lords or their agents)	Building forts, palaces, temples; patronage of religion and the arts; elaborate court ceremonial, etc.

Elements of the third type are set out in Table 3 on the capitalist mode of production (excluding ceremonial fund). The table identifies only the most essential features of capitalism, and, as readers will notice, does not refer explicitly to agrarian class relations and dynamics, to which I turn in a moment.

Table 3

**The capitalist mode of production (excluding ceremonial fund)**

Key questions	Labour	Capital
Who owns what?	The capacity to work (= 'labour power')	The means of production: objects and instruments of labour
Who does what?	Works (including gendered divisions of labour)	Exploits; organises and manages processes of production (and distribution)
Who gets what?	Wages to obtain the means of subsistence (= 'necessary labour') product'	'Surplus labour' in the form of surplus value (= the source of profit)
<b>What do they do with it?</b>		
Consumption	Simple reproduction (gendered)	Simple reproduction at higher levels of wealth and consumption
Replacement	Daily and generational reproduction (hence gendered)	Expanded reproduction or accumulation = investment of profit to make more profit

First, though, it is necessary to emphasize that the three tables have a heuristic purpose; they are illustrative of key questions of political economy, and highly abbreviated or stylised answers to them. They do *not* in any sense claim to act as a summary of actual historical change and development, but only to (partly) organise its investi-

gation. Such investigation will always reveal a great richness and diversity of actual historical forms and patterns, trajectories and outcomes; in this sense doing history is always about identifying and seeking to explain specificity, entailing many other or additional determinations [13. P.101] than those indicated in the three tables.

In the rest of this paper, I will further illustrate these propositions with reference to the histories of capitalism, starting with a series of more specific questions about agrarian transition to capitalism and agrarian change within capitalism. A first set of questions can be framed as (I) *internal to the countryside*, addressing the following:

1. The ‘commodification of subsistence’ [6], and of the means of subsistence, of (‘peasant’) farmers: are they able to reproduce themselves outside (competitive) market exchange of what they produce (sale of ‘output’) and how they produce it (purchase of ‘inputs’)? This connects with a second theme:
2. The commodification of land: does agrarian transition necessarily involve dispossession of ‘peasant’, small or ‘family’ farmers, whether by direct means (expropriation through enclosure) or indirect means (crises of reproduction exerted by market pressures)?
3. How are new classes of capitalist landed property, agrarian capital, and wage labour formed? By what means and with what effects?
4. How, in what forms, and how far, does accumulation of capital in the means of agricultural production (land and instruments of labour) proceed?
5. Is there accumulation ‘from above’ and/or ‘from below’, the latter through the class differentiation of farmers?
6. What are the effects for production growth in farming, realized through the development of the productive forces and especially growth in labour productivity?

Two further themes push against limiting such processes of change to social forces within the countryside, thereby bringing in (II) *rural-urban interconnections*:

7. On the side of capital, what is the significance, and its effects, of (‘agrarian) capital beyond the countryside’ that invests in farm production directly or indirectly, the latter, for example, through contract farming?
8. On the side of labour, what is the significance of ‘rural labour beyond the farm’ involving rural industrialization (from older to more contemporary forms of non-agricultural wage employment) or regular rural labour migration, as vital elements of the incomes and reproduction of classes of labour in the countryside (who may also engage in some ‘own account’ farming)?

Themes 7 and 8 (together with 6) point towards (III) the place of agriculture within larger ‘national’ economies, which becomes more explicit with a further theme:

9. What are the contributions of agriculture to industrialization? Do (particular) states facilitate, hinder or ‘block’ (i) the transfer of agricultural surpluses to industrial accumulation by direct taxation of agrarian classes or indirectly through the terms of exchange between agriculture and industry? (ii) the development of a home market integrating exchange between agriculture and industry? How? And how much?

A final theme concerns the character and effects of (IV) the capitalist *world economy*:

10. What are the effects for agrarian change in particular places at particular times of the formation and interactions of (i) international divisions of labour in agricultural production, international trade in agricultural commodities, how trade is organized and financed, and international investment in agriculture, and (ii) the international state system?

Table 4 lists these questions by their clusters.

Table 4

Questions about agrarian change

Themes	Locus	Questions
I Agrarian class formation	Countryside	1—5
Growth of production and productivity		6
II Rural-urban interconnections:	'National' [and international → IV]	7
◆ 'agrarian' capital beyond the countryside'		
◆ 'rural labour beyond the farm'		
III Agrarian basis of industrialization	'National'	9
IV International divisions of agrarian labour, trade, etc.	Capitalist world economy	10

With the aid of these questions, in the rest of the paper I will discuss three themes, which they are deployed to investigate: the agrarian origins of capitalism, the distinction between farming and agriculture generated by capitalism, and the fate(s) of peasant farmers in the modern worlds of capitalism. Once again this is for illustrative purposes, rather than claiming any comprehensive survey, let alone conclusive results.

With regard to the first theme, the questions listed, and grouped, are familiar from longstanding, and continuing, historical debates about the agrarian origins of capitalism, and, by extension, about the dynamics of change in countrysides since then, especially (but not only) in Asia, Africa and Latin America which connects with the third theme (below). There remains sharp disagreement within political economy concerning the origins and early development of capitalism, which can be classified in terms of two opposing kinds of arguments. One, often characterised as the 'transition from feudalism to capitalism', explains the emergence of capitalism through changes in relations and dynamics of farming in Western Europe, and especially England, from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with agrarian capitalism laying the foundation for subsequent capitalist industrialisation. The other approach, in a variety of versions, is that capitalism could only emerge through the 'world- historical' formation of an international economy, in the first instance centred on the Atlantic world, from, say, the sixteenth century onwards. The dynamic of that emergent world economy, to which European colonisation (Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English and French) was central, was to provide the sources of capital accumulation (or 'primitive accumulation') in (Western) Europe. It is worth noting that while the first position has focussed on and explored the cluster of questions (1—6) concerning change 'internal to the countryside' (of England, the Netherlands, France, Germany), evidently the final question (10) is key to the arguments of the second position without displacing the importance of the other questions (1—9).

My second theme is a substantive proposition that has been argued in my own work, namely how capitalism — and specifically industrial capitalism from the nineteenth century — generated a difference between farming and agriculture, with fundamental effects for farming and farmers. ‘Farming’ and ‘agriculture’ are often used as synonyms but the distinction between them that I propose has a substantive theoretical and historical purpose and is not merely semantic. Farming is what farmers do and have always done, albeit in an immense variety of social, ecological and technical conditions. Subject to some important qualifications, in agrarian societies before the advent of capitalism — in both its European heartlands and colonies — farming was what most people did, and did on very local scales. Farmers connected to non-farmers to some degree — through the exactions of rents and taxes, and through typically localised divisions of labour and exchanges — but the impact on farming of wider divisions of labour, processes of technical change, and market dynamics was very limited relative to the formation of ‘the agricultural sector’ in capitalism. The notion of ‘agriculture’ or the ‘agricultural sector’ in the social division of labour, and as an object of policy and politics, was invented and applied in the development of capitalism. Karl Marx noted that social divisions of labour between agriculture and industry, and between countryside and town (as well as between manual and mental labour) emerged as characteristic features of capitalism. It only made sense to distinguish an agricultural sector when an industrial sector was rising to prominence in the heartlands of capitalism, which carried over later when industrialisation became the main objective of (state) socialist development in the USSR, China and elsewhere, and not least in ‘national development’ in the countries of the South following their independence from colonial rule.

By ‘agriculture’ or ‘the agricultural sector’ in modern (capitalist) economies, I mean farming *together with* all those economic interests, and their specialised institutions and practices, ‘upstream’ and ‘downstream of farming’ that affect the activities and reproduction of farmers. ‘Upstream’ of farming refers to the ways in which the conditions of production are secured before farming itself can begin, including the supply of instruments of labour or ‘inputs’ — tools, fertilisers, seeds — as well as markets for land, labour and credit. ‘Downstream’ of farming refers to what happens to crops and animals when they leave the farm — their marketing, processing and distribution — and how this affects the incomes of farmers, hence their reproduction. Powerful agents upstream and downstream of farming in capitalist agriculture today are exemplified by corporate ‘agri-input’ and ‘agro-food’ capital respectively, in the terms used by T. Weis [14].

‘Agriculture’ in this sense was not given immediately by the origins of capitalism but rather emerged in the subsequent development of capitalism on a world scale, and consolidated from the, say, the 1870s. Its markers were: (1) the emergence of the ‘second industrial revolution’, based in steel, chemicals, electricity and petroleum (the first was based in iron, coal and steam power), which vastly accelerated the development of the productive forces in farming, as well as in food processing, storage, transport, and so on; (2) the first ‘international food regime’ (IFR) from 1970 to 1914, based in wheat: ‘the first price-governed [international] market in an essential means of life’ [11. P. 125]; and (3) the sources of supply of the first IFR in vast frontiers of mostly virgin land,

sparsely populated and little cultivated previously — in Argentina, Australia, Canada and the USA (also Siberia and the Punjab) — now dedicated to the specialised production of ‘essential means of life’ for export to a rapidly industrialising and urbanising Europe. In this conjuncture, Chicago and its agrarian hinterland became the key locus of emergent agribusiness and its institutional innovations upstream and downstream of farming, for example, futures markets [8].

A global division of labour in agricultural production and trade emerged from the 1870s, comprising [12]: (1) new zones of grain and meat production in the ‘neo-Europes’ [9] established by settler colonialism in the temperate Americas, and in parts of Southern Africa, Australia and New Zealand; (2) more diversified patterns of farming in Europe (together with accelerating rural out-migration); and (3) specialisation in tropical export crops in colonial Asia and Africa, and the tropical zones of the former colonies of Latin America (whether grown on peasant or capitalist farms or industrial plantations). Thus, while debate of agrarian ‘transition from feudalism to capitalism’, centred on changes in farming, is rooted in the (earlier) historical experiences of the ‘old’ Europe (England, the Low Countries, France, Germany), and was then extended to other countries such as late nineteenth-century Russia and India after independence, the formation of modern capitalist agriculture is rooted in developments in the world economy from the last third of the nineteenth century.

Concerning the emergence of agriculture as an object of policy and politics, on the supply side in the second half of the nineteenth century ‘specialised commodity production ... [was] actively promoted by settler states and immigration policy, and the establishment of social infrastructure, mainly railways and credit facilities’ — the basis of the first IFR [12. P. 101]. We can also note that, after the Second World War, the strategic subsidies and practices of US wheat exports under PL480 formed the basis of the second IFR (1940s—1973) in H. Friedmann’s compelling account [10]. On the demand side, an emblematic moment was the repeal of the Corn Laws in Britain in 1846; these had protected British farmers and landowners, and their commercial rents, from cheaper imported grain. This occurred before my suggested historical watershed of the 1870s, but, significantly, it did so in the most industrialised capitalist country of the time, and anticipated that watershed, during which Britain imposed ‘free trade’ in food staples on other European countries.

In short, one cannot conceive the emergence and functioning of agriculture in modern capitalism without the centrality and configurations of new sets of dynamics linking agriculture and industry, and the rural and urban, and indeed the local, national and global. Of course, much could be added to amplify this argument, including:

- (1) the vast exodus from European countrysides to populate Europe’s *and* North and Latin America’s growing cities and classes of labour;
- (2) the ways in which industrialisation and other sources of demand for labour (such as mining) generated capital’s search for cheaper food staples to reduce the costs of labour — a typically brutal process that drove the development of the productive forces in farming (and typically ecological destruction), at the same time as factory production destroyed the value of rural handicrafts and artisanal production;

- (3) peasants' growing use over time of industrially manufactured instruments of labour in their farming (and of industrially manufactured means of consumption);
- (4) the extension and intensification of peasant seasonal wage labour, not only on capitalist farms but also in mines, factories, construction, and so on; and
- (5) the historical and contemporary evidence of 'rural labour beyond the farm': the diverse ways in which households and wider family groupings organise themselves in combinations of rural and urban residence, own-account-farming and off-farm employment (including self-employment in the urban informal economy), in order to meet the needs of simple reproduction.

I turn now to my third theme, which is once more most topical and contentious, namely the fate(s) of peasant farmers in the modern worlds of capitalism. This is, inevitably, a very large theme. For the sake of simplicity, two major perspectives or approaches can be distinguished. One is populist ('pro-peasant', 'pro-farmer'), of which the most notable theorist was A.V. Chayanov; the other is a materialist political economy, the stance taken in this article, in which the work of V.I. Lenin is of special importance — significantly both Russian. I will outline four constituent themes and sets of issues, namely (i) the 'commodification of subsistence' in capitalism; (ii) the nature of agricultural petty commodity production in capitalism; (iii) class differentiation of 'peasants' or 'family farmers'; and (iv) investigating the fate(s) of the peasantry today. In each case, I sketch a materialist position and then note populist alternatives.

The 'commodification of subsistence' in capitalism was mentioned already in the first of my 10 questions above. It refers to the processes through which 'peasants'/small farmers are integrated in commodity relations in the development of capitalism, and through which they have to reproduce themselves. Of course, this does not happen immediately, evenly, or through the same mechanisms. For example, in both Europe and the colonial world, direct political means — of expropriation (or the threat of expropriation), imposed delivery of particular crops, and taxation in money (rather than kind) — were used to compel peasants into market production. The depth and degree of such 'commodification of subsistence' did not follow linear trajectories, but a useful index of extent and intensity is a sequence of commodification (a) of crops and livestock produced by peasant farmers; (b) of land; (c) of instruments of production (e.g. factory made ploughs and hoes), and (d) of labor power. A particular moment is reached when peasants/small farmers cannot reproduce themselves outside commodity relations (see further below).

Some idealized versions of a populist position characterize peasant farming as a distinctive form of 'subsistence' production in which households attempt to retain 'autonomy', or control over their own reproduction. More sophisticated versions, following Chayanov, recognize that production for markets becomes increasingly central to peasant reproduction in capitalism, but is still marked by the desire for as much autonomy as possible. That is, peasants/family farmers search for and find ways of regulating, or indeed limiting, their involvement in markets, and aim to achieve an 'optimal' mix for themselves of production for household consumption (or local exchange with other households), for example of food, and commodity production to earn money to pay taxes and/or rents, to purchase some (limited) means of production and some (limited) means of consumption. Moreover, and in line with one of Chayanov's central propositions,



the ways in which peasants engage in markets follows a different logic to that of capitalist enterprises: for the former a calculus of (simple) reproduction versus the latter's calculus of profit (and expanded reproduction).

The second theme is that of petty commodity production. The 'commodification of subsistence' leads to the constitution of peasant farms as petty commodity enterprises in capitalism, that is, combining capital and labor. In short, they need to reproduce both their means of production (land, tools, seeds, livestock, etc.) as capital and themselves as labor. Pressure on reproduction often leads to the familiar condition of peasant indebtedness. The principal point for agrarian political economy is that while not all aspects of peasant farming are (evenly) commodified, a determining point is reached when peasants cannot reproduce themselves outside markets, when indeed commodity relations are *internalized* in the workings of peasant households and enterprises.

Agrarian populism can recognize the pressures that market conditions impose on the reproduction of peasant households. Indeed, as Chayanov [7. P. 40] grimly remarked: 'In the course of the most ferocious struggle for existence, the...[small farmer] who knows how to starve is the one who is best adapted'. However, populists counter the kind of theorization of petty commodity production suggested by arguing that the stock of peasant means of production does not constitute 'capital', even if it has to be replaced, at least in part, through market transactions, and that the logic of household reproduction shapes the repertoires of peasant practices according to the abiding value of 'autonomy'.

These differences between political economy and populist approaches become more evident in the context of my third theme, that of class differentiation of the peasantry emphasized by Lenin. Marx had a kind of 'enclosure' model of the development of capitalist agriculture, in which formerly peasant land was appropriated for larger-scale capitalist farming, and peasants thereby dispossessed became a major component of the proletariat. Lenin's innovation was to propose a model of the development of capitalist agriculture through class differentiation 'from below'. This remains a central analytic of agrarian political economy even if Lenin is regarded as having exaggerated the extent of peasant class differentiation in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century.

As is well know, Lenin distinguished three (emergent) classes as peasants were increasingly incorporated in capitalist commodity relations: rich, middle and poor peasants. Expressing the dynamic that Lenin identified in terms of the model of petty commodity production outlined above, we can suggest the following. 'Rich' peasants are those (typically a small minority) able to reproduce themselves as capital at a greater scale than their reproduction as labor. They acquire more land and instruments of labor (facilitated by access to credit for investment) than can be worked by household members and therefore begin to employ workers for the expanded scale of their enterprises. 'Middle' peasants are able to reproduce themselves as both capital and labor on a more or less constant scale. 'Poor' peasants are unable to reproduce themselves as capital — to maintain landholdings, to purchase tools, fertilizers, seeds, etc. adequate for reproduction — and have to resort to selling their labor power to others, in countryside or town, in a constant struggle for household reproduction. Indeed, it can be suggested that many of them, perhaps a majority in some countrysides today, are better understood as 'classes of labor', who reproduce themselves primarily through wage work, even if they retain some base in farming on however small a scale: so-called 'sub-subsistence farming' (for example, about two-thirds of those classified as 'farmers' in India today).

The populist response to this approach is that class differentiation among the peasantry is almost always likely to be exaggerated, for various reasons. One well-known reason stems from Chayanov's studies of the Russia of his day, namely that observable differences in the landholdings and other means of production of peasant households are due to expansion and contraction over the domestic cycle of the household. This so-called 'demographic differentiation' is cyclical and self-adjusting *versus* the tendencies to persistent and enduring class differentiation emphasized by Lenin. Another (strong) limit to peasant class differentiation, adduced in many cases, is the (continuing) potency of 'levelling' mechanisms that operate in basically egalitarian peasant communities.

My own view is that a materialist approach to class differentiation of the peasantry does not (or at least should not) rule out instances of demographic differentiation or community distributive mechanisms: where they exist, their degree of importance, and, indeed, where they cease to exist, are always questions of *empirical* investigation, and not theoretical deduction. By the same token, a populist approach should not dismiss *a priori*, or seek to explain away, peasant class differentiation in the countryside when that occurs, sometimes in 'hidden' ways. For example, 'snapshot' (static) surveys of peasant farming typically omit those who have left the countryside, or are otherwise not farming, because they were unable to reproduce themselves as farmers. Moreover, when a relatively robust 'middle' peasantry — that formation close to the heart of agrarian populism — is found, it can itself be the product of class differentiation when the 'entry' and reproduction costs of agricultural petty commodity production have risen, to the cost of 'poor' peasants. Moreover, the investment of resources acquired from outside the household farm is so often central to such 'middle peasant' reproduction, which also commonly entails some employment of wage labor from classes of labor in the countryside. In short, even 'middle peasant' reproduction, when and where it occurs, cannot be regarded as the expression of any (pre-given) 'peasant logic' or 'peasant way' of the kinds proposed by agrarian populism.

The three themes and their questions, outlined so far, all feed into the fourth and final theme, that of investigating the fate(s) of the peasantry in capitalism today, which resonates longstanding debates of the 'disappearance' or 'persistence' of the peasantry, albeit now in the conditions of contemporary 'globalization'. On one hand, there is wide agreement about the declining proportions of 'peasant' or 'family' farmers in the economically active population of most (or all) countries, and, some agreement, if to a lesser degree, about their declining shares of overall agricultural production. On the other hand, materialist political economy and agrarian populism have different perspectives on these tendencies. The former investigates them through processes noted above, like the 'commodification of subsistence', the dynamics of petty commodity production in capitalism, class (and gender) differentiation of small farmers, and the growing numbers of rural-based classes of labor, plus the practices of 'agrarian capital beyond the farm' including agribusiness companies and their effects, and the nature and effects of state policies. Indeed, special attention must be paid to the effects of globalizing agricultural markets and agribusiness (and globalizing capitalism more generally) for class formation and contradictions in today's countryside.

Global agribusiness and harmful state policies are highlighted, sometimes almost exclusively — at the cost of attention to class differentiation in the countryside — in populist analysis which recognizes the consequent and enormous pressures on the reproduction of small farmers in capitalism today. At the same time, agrarian populism embraces and applauds what it sees as the resilience of ‘peasant logic’ (Chayanov) and the ‘peasant way’ (*La Via Campesina*) in struggles for socially just and ecologically friendly farming premised on the striving for (small) farmer ‘autonomy’, for example, in notions of ‘food sovereignty’. Indeed, this leads some populist writers to argue that ‘peasant’ is above all a political category rather than an analytical one as it is for materialist political economy. And here there is a central paradox: that agrarian populism, which sees ‘peasants’ or ‘people of the land’ as ‘capital’s other’ [2], displays much greater ideological and political vitality than anything associated with materialist political economy. The translation of the latter into political programs and practices is, of course, affected adversely by the widespread decline of communist and socialist parties in the current conjuncture. Moreover, much of the topical attacks on key aspects of contemporary capitalism that affect agriculture and the fortunes of farmers — ‘industrialization’ (and financialization) of farming and food systems, the deregulation of international trade, genetic engineering and the privatization of ‘intellectual property rights’ in seeds, ‘land grabbing’, and so — are informed by populist perspectives for which ‘the peasant way’ is the necessary antidote and alternative.

My own view, from the perspective of political economy, is not to deny some of the critique of contemporary globalization, or at least its effects, advanced by agrarian populism. Rather my problem with such populism is its advocacy of ‘solutions’ premised on an unconvincing, pre-given and idealized ‘peasant way’ that lacks the analytical means (and desire) to confront processes of class formation in the countryside. Investigating the highly diverse, dynamic and contradictory processes of agrarian change in the world(s) of capitalism today, demands a central focus on class formation in the countryside including widespread patterns of ‘rural labor beyond the farm’, their causes and consequences.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bernstein H. *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change*. Halifax: Fernwood, 2010.
- [2] Bernstein H. Food sovereignty via the “peasant path”. A sceptical view. *Journal of Peasant Studies*. 2014;41(6):1031—1063.
- [3] Bernstein H. Some reflections on agrarian change in China. *Journal of Agrarian Change*. 2015;15(2):454—477.
- [4] Bernstein H. Agriculture/industry, rural/urban, peasants/workers: some reflections on poverty, persistence and change. *Poverty and Persistence of the Peasantry*. J. Boltvinik, S.A. Mann (Eds.). L.: Zed Books, 2016.
- [5] Bernstein H. Revisiting agrarian transition: reflections on long histories and current realities. *Critical Perspectives in Agrarian Transition: India in the Global Debate*. B. Mohanty (Ed.). L.: Routledge, 2016.
- [6] Brenner R. The Low Countries in the transition to capitalism. *Journal of Agrarian Change*. 2001;1(2):169—241.
- [7] Chayanov A.V. *The Theory of Peasant Co-operatives*. L.: I.B. Tauris, 1991.
- [8] Cronon W. *Nature’s Metropolis. Chicago and the Great West*. N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1991.

- [9] Crosby A.W. *Ecological Imperialism. The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- [10] Friedmann H. The political economy of food: A global crisis. *New Left Review*. 1993;197:29—57.
- [11] Friedmann H. Feeding the empire: the pathologies of globalized agriculture. *The Socialist Register 2005*. L. Panitch, C. Leys (Eds.). L.: Merlin Press, 2004.
- [12] Friedmann H., P. McMichael. Agriculture and the state system: the rise and decline of national agricultures, 1870 to the present. *Sociologica Ruralis*. 1989;29(2):93—117.
- [13] Marx K. *Grundrisse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973.
- [14] Weis T. *The Global Food Economy. The Battle for the Future of Farming*. L.: Zed, 2007.
- [15] Wolf E. *Peasants*. Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966.

DOI: 10.22363/2313-2272-2017-17-1-7-18

## **ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ ЭКОНОМИЯ АГРАРНЫХ ИЗМЕНЕНИЙ: КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ ПОНЯТИЯ И ВОПРОСЫ\***

**Г. Бернштейн**

Университет Лондона,  
*Сенат Хаус, ул. Малет, Лондон, WC1E 7HU, Великобритания*  
(e-mail: henrybernstein@hotmail.co.uk)

Статья написана по мотивам лекций, прочитанных в Китайском сельскохозяйственном университете Пекина, а также монографии «Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change» [1]<sup>1</sup> и недавно вышедшей статьи «Some reflections on agrarian change in China» («Некоторые соображения об аграрных трансформациях в Китае») [3]. Библиографический список статьи максимально сокращен, поскольку литература по теме крайне обширна и приведена в других работах автора [1—5]. Статья схематично описывает ключевые понятия политической экономии аграрных изменений, фокусируясь на истории становления и нынешнем состоянии капитализма; формулирует основные вопросы политической экономии аграрных изменений и возможные направления поисков ответов на них; предлагает два набора более конкретных вопросов об аграрном переходе к капитализму и об аграрных трансформациях внутри капиталистического общества (на сельских территориях, с учетом село-городских взаимосвязей, положения сельского хозяйства внутри «национальных» экономик, а также характера и последствий становления мировой капиталистической системы). С помощью последней группы вопросов автор рассматривает три темы: аграрные истоки капитализма, отличие земледельческих практик прошлого от сельского хозяйства капиталистического типа и судьбы крестьян в современном капиталистическом мире. По мнению автора, нельзя понять возникновение и функционирование капиталистического сельского хозяйства, не исследуя его нынешние взаимосвязи с промышленностью и с городом, а также взаимодействие локального, национального и глобального. Три названные темы порождают еще одну — причины неутраченных дискуссий об исчезновении или сохранении крестьянства, которые продолжаются и в условиях глобализации. Автор не отрицает ряда ее негативных моментов и особенно последствий, но скорее категорически не приемлет неубедительную идеологическую идеализацию «крестьянского пути», которая, по сути, отказывается анализировать процессы формирования классов на селе.

**Ключевые слова:** политическая экономия; аграрные изменения; сельское хозяйство и промышленность; капитализм; крестьянство; глобализация; формирование классов

---

\* © Бернштейн Г., 2016.

<sup>1</sup> Русское издание книги вышло в 2016 г.: Бернштейн Г. Социальная динамика аграрных изменений / Пер. с англ. И.В. Троцук. М.: Издательский дом «Дело» РАНХиГС, 2016. 184 с.