

The Collectivization of Agriculture and Marxism

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Introduction

In order for workers organized into collectivities to expropriate the capitalists during the actual process of capitalist production, Marx believed that large-scale activity in industry, commerce, and banking must predominate. In his mind, capitalism itself was the enormous socialized enterprise that would eventually blossom into the full-fledged socialist system. Marx, as we shall see later, believed that under capitalism, large-scale social production would triumph in both industry and agriculture, despite being aware of the fact that large-scale farming faces significantly more obstacles than large-scale industry does, and as a result, the rate of capital concentration in agriculture is slower than in industry. However, if history demonstrates that small-scale production predominates in agriculture and shows little sign of waning or being replaced by large-scale activity, then it follows that our conception of post-revolutionary agriculture must be drastically altered.

This is particularly true because socialism—which entails planning and the end of human exploitation—cannot, by definition, be envisioned in business, finance, or industry as long as individual production and competition—and, consequently, planlessness and inequality—dominate in rural areas. It is possible to picture the two systems coexisting side by side for a while, competing and cooperating with one another. But after a given period of time, the march towards socialism and its ultimate triumph would be completely halted unless the collectivist system were to achieve a dominating position, gradually penetrating and ultimately destroying the individualist sector of production. A second assumption, which is linked to Marx's assumption that large farming will triumph over small farming, is that the rural population will be differentiated into social classes that are ever more clearly defined: a small minority of wealthy farmers and a growing majority of agricultural workers, the latter of which will gradually free itself from the influence and authority of the village nabobs. Based



on an alliance between the industrial and agricultural working classes against the capitalists of town and country, Marx's political philosophy.

Now, the process of class differentiation in the rural population would unavoidably stay less distinct if the victory of the large over small farm were not as well defined as Marx believed. As a result, it would be challenging for the Marxist party to identify rural working class friends who are adamant about collectivization and unattached to private property and individual farming. A fundamental shift in the Marxist notion of the battle for socialism in rural areas would be required if one were to win the support of all peasants as well as just the rural wage earners.

Marx: Capitalism dooms the peasantry

It is important to keep in mind that the socialist revolution was at the centre of Marx's research and analysis while discussing his views on the peasantry. He saw the peasantry as a class as a social form typical of the feudal order—an unusual survival inside capitalism of an antiquated social order that capitalism would eventually drive out of existence. Marx and Engels predicted the end of the peasantry and other minor bourgeois classes in the Communist Manifesto. When asked about how they felt about these people's property, the communists responded, "Are you speaking of the tiny bourgeois, of the small peasant property which was before the bourgeois property? We don't have to get rid of it. The evolution of industry has done, and is daily doing away with it." Similar arguments were made by the International Workingmen's Association in their Manifesto of 1869, which claimed that capitalism and science "condemn small-scale peasant farming to eventual extinction, without appeal and without pity."

They attempt to "turn back the wheel of history" as long as the peasantry and other petty bourgeois groups retain their possessions. According to Marx, the peasantry "represents barbarism without civilization." They are not only conservative but also reactionary when grouped with other petty-bourgeois organisations. "If by chance they are revolutionary, they are only so because of their upcoming transformation into the proletariat; as a result, they defend not their present but rather their future interests; they give up their own perspective to align themselves with the proletariat."

Again, Marx did not include the peasants or other small producers in his life's work, *Capital*, where he examined the capitalist system using an abstract model rather than a



depiction of contemporary society. Nevertheless, the model aimed to show the directions in which capitalism was growing. They appeared destined to vanish with the development of capitalism. Marx expressed some concerns about the peasantry's destiny under capitalism in Volume III of Capital and other later writings on the issue. In Part IV of Volume III, where he outlined his theory of rent, he focused only on the English system of land ownership and rent. Landowners, capitalists, and wage employees were the only socioeconomic classes present in the rural areas, leaving no room for the peasantry. He is very clear in saying that this is just one model, though. He concludes this part with a brief consideration of a different scenario, which casts tiny peasant farmers in the roles of sellers and borrowers beneath trade and financial capital, leading to the decline of agriculture. He makes it obvious that the latter model is a less pure type of capitalist development in agriculture, but he leaves open the question of whether, should capitalism continue to advance, large-scale production would ultimately triumph over small-scale farming. Therefore, it is accurate to state that Marx intended to remove the English style of landownership from the centre of the stage when he further developed his magnificent work. In fact, Engels claimed in the preface to the third volume of Capital Marx that he intended to rewrite the section on rent, giving Russia, which is wealthy in a "variety of forms of real estate and the exploitation of the agricultural producer," an equal role to that of England in the First Volume, which discusses industry. It need scarcely be remarked that the "variety of forms" did not include the English model of large farms.

However, it would be incorrect to infer from this that Marx ever gave up on his main argument that small farming is doomed under capitalism; after all, Russia did not represent a capitalist society but rather a pre-capitalist, semi-feudal one. Contrarily, Marx believed that small-scale agricultural production was doomed until the very end of his life: "Large industry and large agriculture on an industrial scale operate together." Marx's understanding of the possibilities for the peasantry under capitalism must definitely have been shaped by his residence in the only nation in the world since 1850 where large-scale farming predominated and the peasantry had all but vanished.

Marx: On the peasantry's contribution to the socialist revolution

Marx claimed that the peasantry is a reactionary force within capitalism, that is, after the bourgeoisie has gained power, because it is still committed to property. Thus, he claims



that in 1848, the working class in Paris was isolated as a result of "the unrelenting property fanaticism of the peasant," which ultimately resulted in the revolution's failure. He proletarian revolution gains the chorus without which its solo song in all peasant nations becomes a swan song. Only insofar as the peasant becomes aware of the futility of individual farming can he play a progressive, even revolutionary role; when the French peasant parts with his belief in his small holding.

History would repeatedly demonstrate that when capitalist development threatened individual farming, as it did, for example, in Germany during the 1930s Great Depression, the peasant did not join the proletarian revolution as a "chorus," but rather sided with its opponents.

Marx and Engels on the peasants' access to land

Marx's attitude toward private peasant land ownership when it opposed capitalist ownership differed from his attitude when it faced huge feudal ownership because he saw in small farming a relic of feudalism that was being crushed and swept away under the rise of capitalism. It is obvious that Marx supported the tiny peasants' fight for the distribution of enormous feudal properties, but he never backed small property against large capitalist property and always prioritised collective production wherever he thought it might be formed over individual production. To be defended against small private ownership was collective ownership.

Lenin

Without hesitation, Lenin endorsed Kautsky's *Die Agrarfrage*, and his theoretical writings on the topic of large vs small farms mostly consisted of repetitions and elaborations of Kautsky's arguments supported by fresh statistical information. Any departures from Kautsky were in the direction of a stronger emphasis on how capitalism has destroyed small farms. He thus wrote: "The underlying and primary trend of capitalism is the replacement of small-scale output in both industry and agriculture with large-scale production. However, this procedure should not be interpreted solely as an act of expropriation. This process of elimination also involves a process of ruination, which can worsen the farming circumstances of small farmers over years and decades. This degradation shows up in the small farmer's overwork or under nutrition, in a growth in debt, in the deterioration of cattle feed and cattle



condition in general, in the deterioration of land cultivation and manuring practises, in the stalling of technological advancement, etc.”

