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AUTHOR Sinclair, Peter R.
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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the social structure of Canada's agricultural production. It argues that "the official development strategy is typical of state involvement in maturing capitalist economies and that, in so far as these policies are successful, they bring to an end small scale production of primary products by absorbing rural people into an industrial capitalist society". In 1961, the Federal government initiated an agricultural rehabilitation and development programme. Later the legislation was expanded to include the whole question of regional development. A detailed breakdown of farms by economic class in 1971 indicated that the petit bourgeoisie, although still dominant in numbers, was economically dominated by a small group of large capitalist enterprises, although there was much variation by region and type of product. This relative weakness of the petit bourgeois system of production resulted in rural poverty and regional depopulation. Large scale, technically sophisticated industry, located in the major urban markets, had made small manufacturing uncompetitive, even in its local markets. In order to provide for their families, many of the poorest farmers migrated to more rewarding urban employment. In so far as they are successful, the government policies on rural and regional development in Canada have actually sped up this process. (NQ)

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PRODUCTION SYSTEMS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA

Peter R. Sinclair, Ph.D.

Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
University of Guelph,
Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

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Production Systems and Rural Development in Canada.

Hardly any serious student of rural Canada questions the existence of low incomes, poor health and social facilities relative to the conditions prevailing in urban areas (see, e.g., Harp, 1971; Buckley and Tihanyi, 1967; Canadian Council on Rural Development, 1970; Pépin, 1968). By the early sixties it was impossible to ignore that the rural areas of Canada had not shared sufficiently in the rewards of post war economic expansion. Rural development had become a problem. Thus, in 1961, the federal government initiated an agricultural rehabilitation and development programme (ARDA) in an attempt to cope with the problem. In later years the legislation was expanded to bring into its scope the whole question of regional development (for a useful review of ARDA, see McCrorie, 1969).

My concern in this paper is to examine the social structure of agricultural production in 1970, which will provide the subject for a theoretical interpretation of the development problem. I shall argue that the official development strategy is typical of state involvement in maturing capitalist economies and that, in so far as these policies are successful, they bring to an end small scale production of primary products by absorbing rural people into an industrial capitalist society. Unfortunately, this does not meet the needs of many rural people and may bring them no more than a new set of problems. Regardless of our evaluation of the results, there is little doubt that the system of rural production is changing at present and a better theoretical understanding of what is happening in the Canadian countryside is the first requirement of a constructive critique. Hopefully, I can approach that goal in this paper.

Stratification and agricultural production systems.

The persistence of low incomes in agriculture, despite a decade of ARDA legislation, is apparent from Table 1.¹ Within the rural population itself the expected inequalities by class position and sex occur, although foremen earn considerable more than farmers. This probably reflects the fact that only large and prosperous farms employ foremen, whereas the farmer category includes a large number of small scale producers. Why managers should report lower incomes than foremen is unclear. The table also indicates that the Canadian agricultural worker tends to be self employed. Informative though it is in some respects, this data does not permit us to appreciate the different production systems in Canadian agriculture (with regard to scale, social organization and technology), yet it is the trend and structure of production that underlies the rural development problem.

At mid century, petit bourgeois or owner operated family units appeared to be the dominant form of Canadian agriculture. Mechanization, rather than eliminating the family producer, allowed him to survive longer as dependence on hired labour was reduced for those who were able to stay on the land. It was the rapid decline in the number of farm units from about 1940 which caused the advocates of family farms much concern. However, the continued prevalence of owner operated farms and the insignificant use of hired labour on a permanent basis suggested that petit bourgeois agriculture remained healthy, indeed, more prosperous as the remaining farms were larger and more efficient. However, the detailed breakdown of farms by economic class in the 1961 census and, especially, in 1971 paints a picture of Canadian farming in which the petite bourgeoisie, although still dominant in numbers, is economically dominated by a small group of large capitalist enterprises,

although there is much variation by region and type of product. Using the census data it is possible to provide some insight into the considerable degree of inequality associated with the different systems of production.

In Canadian agriculture, land tenure is not the key factor distinguishing different production systems. Almost all farms are owner operated or part owner operated. In 1971, only 5.3 per cent of farms were run by tenants. In these circumstances the relationship between different production systems can be approached through comparing farms according to their scale of operation. From available sources of data, this is best measured by gross annual sales, while recognizing that the short term price movements of many agricultural products may lead to some misinterpretation of the scale of operation when our data are limited to one year. Nevertheless, the sales criterion is preferable to either farm area or capital value in that sales reflect the actual utilization of resources. In addition, there is the problem of choosing boundaries for categories. Thus, the following typology must be considered very tentative. Using the sales criterion, I have identified four farm categories, each of which has a distinctive place in the overall production of agriculture.

1. Subsistence/Supplementary farms (SS). This category is operationally defined as all farms which reported total sales in 1970 of under \$2,500. Production on such farms will reflect only a minimal orientation to the market; it involves either subsistence production, or is considered as a supplement to off farm labour. Such farms are household rather than market enterprises.

2. Marginal petit bourgeois farms (MPB). While the petite bourgeoisie may be identified as the class of small scale entrepreneurs who

4.

depend on family labour, there may still be considerable variation in scale of operations. The marginal category includes those who have low sales, low profits and considerable off farm labour. Their farms are marginal in that they do not permit (or are not managed in such a way as to permit) a comfortable material standard of living to the families which depend on them. Farms in this category are defined as those with annual 1970 sales between \$2,500 and \$9,999. Since the average was \$5,673 and operating expenses accounted for 40-50 per cent of sales in many cases, it is only in the upper limits of this income range that farm incomes exceeded the widely used poverty line of the Economic Council of Canada - \$4,500 for a family of four in 1970. It is a reasonable conclusion that the upper limit of the marginal category is really conservative. Thus the data on the distribution of marginal farms are underestimated, although still spectacular.

3. Comfortable petit bourgeois farms (CPB). In this category there is a considerable range of enterprise (annual sales from \$10,000 to \$49,999). Generally speaking, we include here the 'ideal' family farm, i.e., one which is sufficiently large to provide a comfortable standard of living but not so large as to require extensive use of hired labour. More than in the previous category, CPB farms are clearly business enterprises.

4. Industrial Farms (Ind.). All farms with \$50,000 or more annual sales are included and the average is \$114,688, markedly greater than in the other cases. Although seldom approaching the scale of California's field factories, farms in this class are typically industrial capitalist enterprises, using hired labour and having considerable capital investment. It is this type of farming which is thought to threaten the family farm. We shall now investigate to what extent that fear is justified.

From Table 2 we can see that nearly 70 per cent of Canadian farms were no more than marginal enterprises. In the Atlantic Provinces and British Columbia this problem is particularly apparent. Industrial farms, on the other hand, remained a small proportion of all farms in 1971 (2.9 per cent), yet they accounted for almost 30 per cent of all sales. This compares with the 2.5 per cent of total sales which was earned by the 29 per cent of farms falling into the SS category. In provinces characterized by a large proportion of small units, the market control of the few large farms was especially apparent, none more so than in Newfoundland, where industrial farms had some 53 per cent of all sales.

Table 3 demonstrates the anticipated patterns in use of hired labour and off-farm work. As scale of enterprise increases so does the use of hired labour. The only anomaly here is that the few SS farms that do have permanent labour seem to use more of it than any except industrial farms (2.3 workers per farm compared with 1.3 in both petit bourgeois categories). Perhaps this reflects the labour intensiveness of dairying which is, however, conducted on a small scale, particularly in Quebec. Labour off the farm by the operator decreases as scale of farm increases, but it is noteworthy that 45.4 per cent of SS farmers report no off-farm work. Unless incomes are supplemented by earnings of other family members or by government transfer payments this suggests a very low living standard indeed. Those for whom farming is a part time supplementary activity appear to be relatively small, even in the SS category where about 25 per cent have 229 or more days in other forms of employment.

Table 4 provides additional data on concentration of production on industrial farms indicating that dairying and field crops are relatively free from this process at the national level. It is probable, however, that the

very low figure for Saskatchewan where industrial farms accounted for only 3.8 per cent of field crop sales reflected the dramatic fall of returns on wheat farming in 1970 compared with the late sixties. It is also true that some field crops, such as tobacco, are highly concentrated although not a major part of Canadian production as a whole. Thus 19.7 per cent of all tobacco farms were industrial units, several times greater than for any other product (Statistics Canada Cat. 96-701: T52). In Canada as a whole nearly 75 per cent of poultry production was controlled by industrial farms and almost 50 per cent of vegetable/fruit production. These should be compared with the low figure of 9.8 per cent for dairying, which suggests that the type of product is an important variable influencing the spread of industrial farms. Nevertheless, the historical census data indicate a general increase in concentration. We can expect this trend to continue, resulting in a greater percentage of farms falling into the industrial category. Of course, in agriculture, we are still far away from the day when the domination of production can be indicated by counting the few producers who control most of the market. Industrial farms are presently a small percentage (2.9) of all farms, but this still amounts to over 10,000 production units. Concentration, however, is greater than this data would imply since vertical integration promoted by large food processing and retailing companies in the form of contract purchasing is becoming a major feature of the organization of the agricultural industry (Abel, 1966: 207-12).

Having provided an overview of the various systems of agricultural production, I can now turn to the question of rural development.

The rural development problem.

In what sense is there a rural development problem? This may be

approached in two complementary ways. On the one hand, the rise of the industrial farm changes the social relations of production and introduces capitalist-labour conflict to the rural setting.² On the other hand, the concentration process threatens the livelihood of uncompetitive small farmers, eventually driving them off the land. Whether this is to be desired or not from the point of view of productivity is a moot point, but it would be hard to deny that this pressure for change constitutes a major social problem. The class dimension of that problem has already been documented. Thus, some 70 per cent of Canadian farmers have uneconomic farms and are faced with the problem of coping in a hostile environment. This is the question as I see it.

To understand why present rural or regional development policies have failed to eliminate rural poverty, to understand the persistent off-farm migration, it is vital to trace the evolution of the present systems of production. In doing this it is better to look at the problems of rural development in terms of the relationships between modes of production than either of the main competing models - the dual economy approach and metropolis-satellite dependency.

The dual economy model recognizes the technical and social differences that may exist within a society and focusses in particular on the town-country division. The backwardness of the countryside is seen as independent in that it is the product of internal deficiencies within the rural sector. I do not question that there are distinctive internal features of rural production systems, but the dual economy theorists fail to see that the depressed standards of the countryside are caused, at least in part, by the way that rural production is linked with the urban industrial sector.

The metropolis-satellite model, closely associated among English readers with A.G. Frank (1967), but actually widespread in South American social science (see Oxaal et al, 1975), grasps the structural dependency of the underdeveloped areas which are systematically exploited and drained of their resources. There have been several valuable critiques of Frank's work and, more generally, of the theory of internal colonialism (e.g., Oxaal et al, 1975; Bartra, 1974), but for the purpose of this paper the critical point is that the regional analysis implied in the model, while it locates the areas where there is a maximum concentration of the development problems, often lead to overlooking the regions where most deprived people live. In Canada, for example, the Atlantic provinces certainly constitute the poorest region, but more poor people actually live in the 'wealthy' metropolitan province of Ontario (Adams et al, 1975: 63).

If, however, we take systems of production as our basic units of analysis both the problem of sector independence and the problem of using a territorial metaphor can be avoided. Production systems may be linked in relations of domination and conflict. Also, secondary or subordinate systems can exist in the very territorial centres of dominant systems. A system or mode of production includes the technology and human labour power applied to raw materials as well as the social relations (principally class relations, but also supporting social institutions) which are linked with the production process. It is a basic principle of Marxist sociology that production systems become historically transformed as technical capacity improves. Furthermore, any particular society or social formation may contain more than one production system when it is in the process of change; indeed, each production system is 'pregnant' with a future one. Social conflicts exist both within and between

systems. Therefore, in studying any particular society we would do well to begin by establishing the social structure of production, recognizing that the development of the society is fundamentally the development of competing production systems.

Canada of the 1970's is dominated by the late capitalist mode of production in which state and private corporations jointly supervise the application of advanced technology in a system of production which remains oriented to the making of profit from wage labour. Canadian capitalism is based on resource extraction and trade with a secondary manufacturing industry increasingly under the control of multi-national corporations (e.g., Laxer, 1973; Levitt, 1970). The state is the key supportive institution which tries to alleviate the effects of crisis, takes over the supply of costly social overhead capital facilities, is the largest consumer of corporate production, and intervenes in determining the price of labour (see especially Habermas, 1975). At the same time, the rising expenses of the Canadian state apparatus are increasingly born by the middle and low income earners, while corporate shares of taxation fall (Deaton, 1973). Educational, media and parliamentary institutions legitimize the social structure, although the fragmentation of classes would make opposition difficult anyway.

The scale and power of state-corporate capitalism has made the earlier system of petit bourgeois commercial and subsistence production more and more unviable. As I have already mentioned petit bourgeois production is carried on in units which are small enough to be operated by the owner of the means of production and his immediate family. Non family wage labour is rarely utilized. In Canada, both agriculture and fishing were established by the eighteenth century as petit bourgeois enterprises. These small producers were not politically dominant, but provided a source of security and supplies to the

British Imperialist enterprises operating in Canada. Later, western Canada was settled by small holders, in part, to serve the interests of commercial, financial and industrial capitalists in central Canada. Gradually, the areas of petit bourgeois settlement fell into a position of relative underdevelopment as their small units lacked the economic or political power to provide levels of reward on the same basis as industrial capitalism. Under pressure from organized capitalism, petit bourgeois producers occasionally became organized themselves (as in the prairie populist and co-operative movements) and fought back, but only minor concessions could be extracted. For the most part, the petite bourgeoisie have lacked class consciousness and have been exploited in their social isolation. This has occurred despite the dependence of Canadian capitalism on the economic contribution of the agricultural sector, because control of resources without organization and class consciousness does not give power.³

The consequences of the relative weakness of the petit bourgeois system of production are the twin problems of rural poverty and regional depopulation. For example, parts of the Atlantic provinces, which appear deserted and decaying to contemporary observers were once centres of local small industry, which provided a market for local agriculture. Pépin (1968) reports that both manufacturing and farming have been declining in Charlotte and Kent counties, New Brunswick, since the late nineteenth century. Similarly, Kings county, Prince Edward Island, contains areas which were well developed 60 years ago, but are now featured by forest land degenerating into scrub and many deserted farms on land that is potentially productive. The industrial capitalist system of production undermines the local economies in both primary and secondary sectors. Thus, large scale, technically sophisticated industry, located in the major urban markets, makes small manufacturing

uncompetitive, even in its local markets. From this it would appear that the problem of rural development, underdevelopment or backwardness is really a problem of urban industrial capitalism.

In order to provide for their families, it becomes essential for many of the poorest farmers to react to these circumstances by migrating to more rewarding urban employment. But often they are disappointed in their expectations and become part of a solution which is no solution at all in that higher living costs and limited job opportunities for unskilled labour are common conditions (Abramson, 1970). Where land has productive capacity it may be retained to supplement wage labour or sold to farmers who have more resources and are trying to operate on a larger scale. In this way agriculture itself becomes industrialized and gives rise to social relations between owners and workers characteristic of more advanced capitalism.

In so far as they are successful the government policies on rural and regional development in Canada are actually policies to speed up this process and they have been resisted by those who want a way of living comfortably in their traditional occupations and communities. Regional development strategies are designed to provide a viable economic base by encouraging the establishment of industry through using incentive grants. Yet, despite the claim at its founding that the federal department of regional and economic expansion (DREE) was concerned to expand employment opportunities in low income regions, the actual grant system provides rewards to private industry for building capital rather than labour intensive industries (Woodward, 1974, 1975). Basically this is because DREE grants defray capital costs rather than labour costs. Even if administered without any bias towards capital intensive corporations, the DREE programme would have a marginal effect in raising employment opportunities in deprived regions. And even where

comprehensive regional programmes have been proposed, (for example, in the lower St. Lawrence-Gaspé region), with the involvement of the local population in the planning process, considerable out-migration was considered necessary. (For a good summary of the Gaspé project see Smith, 1970.)

Rural development strategy encourages the rationalization of production by improved technology, cheap credit for expansion and the encouragement of co-operative enterprise. It is hoped that those who remain on the land will then be productive and prosperous, while others can be accommodated in urban settings. A prime example of this is the resettlement of the people in Newfoundland's outports (Copes, 1972; Iverson and Matthews, 1968). As the outport communities which depended on the inshore fisheries became uneconomic whole populations were moved to 'growth centres'. But the growth centres did not provide the kind of environment to which the fishermen were suited. Many were bitter and disappointed. Ontario's farm retirement programme is a more delicate and successful operation on the same principle, i.e., that primary industry must be more concentrated to be economically viable.

Conclusion.

Rural development, understood as concentration of production and population movement, is indeed going on. If the industrial corporation is the image of the future for rural production, then the development process is well underway. But if development is to mean more than economic growth, more than integration into an urban industrial society, there is no reason for optimism. If development involves a more equitable distribution of resources as well as a larger resource pie, if it involves the elimination of relations

of dependency and exploitation, then the problem of rural development remains to be addressed. In that case the context of rural development must be considered in a wider sense, i.e., rural production must be seen as part of late industrial capitalism in whose problems it shares.

Footnotes.

1. The data on income by occupation should be treated with caution since the occupational status is determined by the respondents' work in the week prior to enumeration in 1971, whereas the income refers to 1970.

2. The family farmers who rarely use hired labour occasionally make common fronts with the urban working class in that both have a common interest in challenging the domination of corporate industry and finance. However, this alliance has always been shaky in that labourers have an interest in low food prices and higher wages; which, in the long run, affect farmers through higher costs.

3. Of course, small manufacturers face the same set of problems and in some cases it is the destruction of local small scale manufacturing which indirectly threatens the agricultural economy.

Table 1.

Rural Occupations and Annual Employment Income, Canada, 1970.

Occupation	Number		Annual Income	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
All farming, horticulture and animal husbandry	401,385	46,030	\$3,321	\$1,541
Farmers	245,970	9,175	3,699	2,131
Farm managers	20,045	660	4,923	3,288
Foremen	4,075	400	5,880	2,325
Farm workers	79,900	30,195	1,784	1,322
Nursery and related workers	40,840	1,990	3,074	1,452
Farm machinery & custom operators	5,365	255	2,359	824
Other workers	5,190	2,855	3,847	1,632
Fishing, hunting, trapping and related occupations	32,790	720	3,340	1,699
Forestry and logging	75,790	1,595	4,544	1,688
All occupations	6,123,325	3,249,440	6,574	3,199

Source: Census of Canada 1971, Catalogue 94-768.

Table 2.

DISTRIBUTION OF FARM TYPES AND PERCENTAGE OF
TOTAL SALES, CANADA AND THE PROVINCES, 1970-1.

	S/S		MPB		CPB		I nd.	
	% farms	% sales	% farms	% sales	% farms	% sales	% farms	% sales
Canada	29.3	2.5	39.6	19.8	28.1	48.4	2.9	28.9
Nova Scotia	56.9	4.9	22.8	12.8	16.4	36.9	3.6	45.4
Newfoundland	70.5	4.6	13.3	10.9	11.5	31.6	2.3	52.9
Prince Edward Island	38.6	4.4	39.0	24.3	19.7	44.8	2.5	26.3
New Brunswick	52.2	5.1	26.3	15.9	18.7	46.1	2.5	32.4
Quebec	33.0	3.5	41.3	26.9	23.6	49.0	1.5	19.8
Ontario	30.6	1.9	31.5	12.2	33.0	49.3	4.9	36.4
Manitoba	27.5	3.0	45.4	26.7	25.3	47.5	1.7	22.5
Saskatchewan	17.9	2.7	52.4	33.0	28.4	52.3	1.0	11.1
Alberta	25.5	1.9	39.1	17.0	31.3	46.7	3.6	34.1
British Columbia	53.0	3.4	22.7	10.5	19.4	39.6	4.7	46.6

Source: Census of Canada 1971, volume 4, Table 52.

Table 3.

TYPE OF FARM, SALES, HIRED LABOUR AND OFF FARM WORK, CANADA, 1970-71.

	Type of Farm				
	SS	MPB	CPB	Ind.	Total
Distribution of farms (per cent)	29.3	39.6	28.1	2.9	99.9
Distribution of sales (per cent)	2.5	19.8	48.4	28.9	99.6
Average value of sales	\$957	\$5,673	\$19,524	\$114,688	\$11,328
<u>Hired Labour</u>					
Farms with paid labour (per cent)	15.2	31.6	57.0	84.0	35.4
Av. no. week paid labour per farm reporting any	14.2	12.1	34.2	168.2	29.6
Per cent of farms with permanent workers	1.2	2.7	26.4	45.9	10.1
Av. no. permanent workers per farm reporting any	2.3	1.3	1.3	3.8	2.0
<u>Off farm work</u>					
Per cent of operators reporting off farm work	54.6	34.3	21.2	15.4	35.3
Per cent of operators reporting 229 + days of off farm work	25.5	8.6	3.0		11.5

Source: Census of Canada 1971, Catalogue 96-701.

Table 4.

INDUSTRIAL FARM SALES AS PER CENT OF ALL SALES BY PROVINCE AND PRODUCT.

	All products	Products				
		Field crops	Veg., fruit etc.	Poultry/ eggs	Livestock	Dairy
Canada	28.9	15.7	49.2	74.4	33.2	9.8
Newfoundland	52.9	23.9	39.5	80.1	24.6	19.9
Nova scotia	45.4	41.9	55.7	86.7	38.0	16.5
Prince Edward Island	26.3	37.2	27.8	53.2	22.0	4.2
New Brunswick	32.4	33.6	52.6	78.3	17.7	12.2
Quebec	19.8	21.1	45.2	66.6	18.9	2.4
Ontario	36.4	32.0	51.4	79.4	35.0	10.9
Manitoba	22.5	9.8	41.2	64.8	27.6	13.2
Saskatchewan	11.1	3.8	44.8	59.8	20.5	12.0
Alberta	34.1	16.2	63.2	64.9	42.4	16.0
British Columbia	46.6	29.9	43.7	81.2	43.0	31.7

Source: Census of Canada 1971, vol.4, table 52.

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