

# AGRARIAN REFORM AS AN AGENT OF SPATIAL REORGANISATION—SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR A COMPARATIVE GEOGRAPHICAL DISCUSSION†

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Before entering into this discussion, it is necessary to establish some premises in the shape of considerations on the term “agrarian reform.” This necessity comes, firstly, of a situation in which there exists a certain terminological confusion concerning the definition and the usage of phrases such as “agrarian reform,” “land reform,” “agricultural revolution” and “land improvement.” It comes, secondly, of the possible objection against taking up agrarian reform as a subject of geography.

## I

The English term “agrarian reform” is often used synonymously with “land reform” (Warriner, 1969, et al). But the term, “land reform” has been subject to different interpretations. Land reform in the narrow sense refers to measures for the redistribution of property or the right to land in favour of peasants and small farmers (Warriner, 1969, et al). In its broadest meaning, it may be taken as a comprehensive programme for the transformation of the entire agricultural economy, even to the point of embracing consolidation and registration in areas where customary tenure is prevalent and also for land settlement on new land (U.N., 1963). In many other languages and, in some cases, also in English, careful distinctions are drawn between “agrarian reform” (*réforme agraire* in French) and “land reform” (*réforme foncière* in French). For instance, for a French geographer, *réforme agraire* refers to “comprehensive measures aiming at the transformation of the land tenure system and hence of social and economic relations in the framework of a state, region or rural community, by eliminating social obstacles in order to admit of both quantitative and qualitative improvements in agricultural production” (P. George, *Dictionnaire de la Géographie*, 1970, p.357). It is safe to exclude mere technical improvement in agriculture or land reclamation from the concept of agrarian reform, and to consider agrarian reform as a type of reform measure for land ownership or the tenancy structure which aims at or is accompanied by measures for the increase of agricultural productivity (Tai, 1974;

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Le Coz, 1974). In this way, land reform is a prerequisite for, but constitutes only a part of, agrarian reform. In order to denote purely technical progress in agriculture, we may use either one of the terms "agricultural (or 'land') improvement" and "agricultural revolution" (*révolution agricole*). The latter refers, naturally, to an overall technical innovation on a societal level. This sort of distinction between "agrarian reform" and "land reform," in English at least, has a certain historical significance. Land reform in the traditional sense always meant the redistribution of property in land for the benefit of landless workers, tenants and small farmers. But experiences in early reforms in Haiti, Russia and the Philippines, for example, showed that land redistribution pure and simple often led to drastic falls in production. The importance came to be realised of complementary measures such as education, agricultural credit, technical assistance, capital investment in infrastructure, cooperatives, research and improved methods of processing and marketing. The definition of land reform was expanded so that land reform became not so much a concept but more the conception of a policy; and, with this broad approach, the use of the term "agrarian reform" came into vogue (King, 1977).

This kind of conceptional distinction between "agrarian reform" and "land reform" is clear and convincing enough from a semantic point of view but the effect it leaves with us is still one of compromise. As historical experiences have already shown, the redistribution of landed property aiming at the realisation of social equity or social justice was not always compatible with an increase in economic efficiency in farm management. Even if it did result in an increase in agricultural productivity and hence in the levelling-up of the income standard of the peasantry, it is debatable whether this would really mean the maximisation of the national economic growth. For it is the accumulation of surplus, exploited from the agricultural sector and concentrated in the hands of a small number of landed proprietors leaving the peasantry in a state of poverty that serves, under certain conditions, to induce a big spurt forwards in the national economy. It is possible for us to distinguish certain structural reform measures in agriculture from those of agrarian reform, the former being those measures that have for their primary target an increase in agricultural productivity in the national interest; hence, where they are concerned, land reform is not necessarily a prerequisite (O.E.C.D., 1972).

On the basis of the foregoing preliminary considerations, we are able to indicate three points necessary for the evaluation of any kind of agrarian reform in the broader sense (including the above-mentioned spurious type of reform): (1) Preexisting conditions, which are to be primarily examined, these being the land tenure system characterised by the dominant mode of production in agriculture (precapitalist or capitalist) and the type of farm enterprise consisting of large estates or commercial farms; (2) The scope and implications of agrarian reform policies which are influenced strongly by the social classes having hegemonic control over the state (landed elite or bourgeoisie). For an appraisal of the intentions both implicit and explicit of the hegemonic classes that have been in the vanguard of agrarian reform, it is necessary to take into consideration not only the economic motives involved but also political and social concerns, such as the alleviation of social tension, the maintenance of national political integration, the reaction to international impact and so on; and (3) The consequences of agrarian reform which must be analysed in a comprehensive way, enabling an examination to be made of them in different economic sectors (both reform

and non-reform sectors) from not only the economic viewpoint but also the social, political and cultural. Very often, the consequences turn out to be different from those expected or implied.

Let us set aside here agrarian reforms under a socialist economy, a matter which is actually of deep interest, since it still seems to be debatable whether or not state ownership of land and collectivisation constitute the ideal and only possible path under socialism. As for agrarian reform undertaken with the capitalist mode of production dominant in the country at large, economically speaking, we can find four main types, i.e., (i) reforms that imply some redistribution of land but that have not challenged the domination of precapitalist estates over agriculture, (ii) reforms that have promoted the transition to capitalism in agriculture along either the junker or the farmer road of development, (iii) reforms within capitalist agriculture, either to induce a shift from the junker to the farmer road of capitalist development or to redistribute the land within either, and (iv) reforms within capitalist agriculture which more often than not have failed to establish either the farmer or junker line of development rather than effect the mobilisation of labour forces from the agricultural sector, hence resulting in the massive part-timerisation of agricultural management.

## II

If agrarian reform is categorically defined as land tenure reform possibly attended by measures for agricultural development, it can be carried out irrespective of time and place, i.e., in any period and in any country. When we make much account of the role of a central or local government and add as a collateral condition the redistribution of landed properties in order to realise social equity or social justice for the benefit, that is, of small farmers and agricultural labourers, the scope of time in which agrarian reform remains a political issue becomes rather limited.

We continue to exclude, as we already have done in the discussion up till now, those various measures such as land registration, land allotment or rural resettlement which were carried out under the absolutist powers of the central government with the purpose of increasing or securing their revenues obtained from taxes and other charges. Cases involving the division of communal or ecclesiastical land, something which occurred in many European countries, present somewhat delicate problems. If the measures for the transfer of communal or expropriated lands to private ownership took place through normal public auctions, without any legal or financial facilitation to enable the peasantry to purchase lots, we cannot call such measures agrarian reform.

Some of these liquidation measures of the premodern land tenure system, however, resulted in the establishment of the landed peasant proprietorship, or at least peasant land-ownership was mentioned as one of the purposes of these measures. This was in spite of the fact that the actual consequences of the liquidation measures were in favour of the landed bourgeoisie. Did not the declaration of the Assemblée Legislative of August 14, 1792, concerning the division of communal land result in the favour of the rural proletarians? Was there not any motif pertaining to agrarian reform in the repeated measures for the liquidation of ecclesiastical lands (*desamortizacion*) in Spain, especially during 1836-37? Can we not observe the same thing in the measures adopted in order to resolve the secular

public demesne question (*questione demaniale*) in Southern Italy? However, in the countries involved, there existed neither a peasant movement nor political forces advocating the slogan "land and freedom" for the benefit of the peasantry. Anyhow, the problem awaits further detailed and prudent discussion because it concerns not only the identification of the historical origin of agrarian reform but also the validity or the range of this term if it is considered also to imply legal measures to modernise the status of ownership or to establish private land-ownership in developing countries. In many developing countries agrarian reform, even in the true sense of the term, in great part very often comprises legal procedures such as the establishing of private ownership which serve, at best, to reconfirm the status quo where land tenureship is concerned, or to consolidate the junker style of capitalist development in agriculture, marginalising the peasant masses.

There exists on the other hand a strong tendency to limit the application of the term "agrarian reform" to cases found in developing countries. (Lehman et al, 1974; Tai, 1974: Warriner, 1969). In a certain sense, this argument is well-grounded. First of all, it is in the countries called "underdeveloped" that agrarian reform as a social change is affecting the lives of the farm people. It is also in such still mainly agricultural countries that agrarian reform as economic change is affecting not only the farming sectors but also the entire national economy. There is also a strong claim that past reform measures for transforming the tenancy system and the agrarian structure and also the reform measures realised out of the market mechanism in socialist countries, were very different in nature as well as in significance from present-day agrarian reforms in developing countries. Though the matter is still debatable as in the case of the creation of small farmer proprietorship in France, we should recognise for the present that, in the early industrialised capitalist countries, most aspects of the tenancy system and the structure of agricultural production have undergone a radical transformation simultaneously with the process of industrial revolution in the economic sense or through the bourgeois revolution in the political sense. At the same time, however, we must remark that even among advanced industrialised countries, late joiners such as Italy and Japan and the backward areas or the internal colonies of the first comers, typically exemplified by Ireland, were compelled to leave the agrarian structure in their respective nations under the dominance of either a so-called semi-feudal social relationship or a large parasitic landownership system having low agricultural productivity and peasant poverty. To be more precise, sectoral and urban-rural dualisms such as these continued to be reproduced, each lasting for a certain length of time, and serving to facilitate the original accumulation required by industrialisation, or to afford cheap labour forces to the advanced capitalist sector, or to secure the supply of cheap food in the domestic market, and so on. To repeat, these lasted, however, for certain periods of time only because, sooner or later, for a variety of reasons depending on the different situations of the countries mentioned, the matter of agrarian reform inevitably emerged as an urgent task to be dealt with. In Ireland, for instance, the term "agrarian reform" was already in use around the end of the last century and bore the same connotations that it has today. The agrarian reforms thus called into question must have, I would maintain, a common basic character with present-day agrarian reforms in developing countries which have experienced the reproduction of sectoral and centre-periphery dualism on two levels, i.e., international relations and urban-rural relationships.

These common basic characters are the starting point for comparative studies of agrar-

ian reform in social geography. As a matter of due course, agrarian reform has brought about drastic changes both in the social structure of rural areas in the agricultural landscape where land-use patterns and field systems are concerned. This should be sufficient to convince us that agrarian reform constitutes an important subject of social geography when it is understood as the study of the socio-economic aspects of spatial organisation. At the same time, the remarkable influences of agrarian reforms on non-agricultural sectors and on areas not affected directly by the reforms should also constitute ample proof of the importance of agrarian reform in socio-geographical studies when these are understood to constitute sociological analyses of changing spatial organizations.

### III

We have already extensively pointed out the cardinal topics for comparative studies of agrarian reform. As an example of international comparison we make here some fundamental comparative remarks on the agrarian reforms of two countries, that is, Italy and Japan.

The historical background of the agrarian reforms of these two countries is rather similar; both countries were late joiners of industrialised powers, which in the agricultural sector maintained parasitic landownerships and, in order to cope with the narrowness of the domestic market due mainly to the poverty of the peasantry which led the two countries to a confrontation with first comer countries, had to rely on expansionistic policies in search of outlets for their industrial products. In both countries agrarian reform was formally put through in the postwar period; but in prewar times the necessity for it had already been under discussion and embryonic measures were adopted. In both cases, these measures were, fundamentally, carried out under guidelines set up by the central authorities of the time.

In the two countries, however, where agrarian reform was concerned, preexisting conditions, the measures realised and the consequences greatly differed. While in Italy there existed a great number of regional differences in the agrarian structure, that of prewar Japan was relatively homogeneous; there was a predominance of small farm households of peasant families, more than half of which were tenants of mostly absentee landlords. Although there were differences in agricultural productivity levels and in the intensity of patriarchal relationships in village communities between northeastern and southwestern Japan, these regional differences were far smaller than Italian ones. In Italy, the reform of the agrarian structure became a subject of controversy chiefly in the debates on the Southern Italy (*Mezzogiorno*) Question, many aspects of which became explicit immediately after the unification of the state but which instigated much discussion of the large estate (*latifondo*) system, which was a typically Mediterranean type of landlordism. In comparison with the *latifondo* system which was accused by many meridionalists of being antisocial in character and of having the function of obstructing the intensification of agriculture, the other tenure systems dominating other parts of Italy, the *métayage* system in Central Italy and Veneto and the large farmstead (*cascina*) system in the Po Plain, for instance, were not considered very problematic. The arguments which appeared in the publications of the Georgofili Academy of Florence on the *métayage* crisis were mostly vindictory and there was hardly any argument against the *métayage* system of Central Italy. In spite of the massive pro-

letarianisation of the rural population in the late nineteenth century, the *cascina* management consisting of rice and wheat cultivation and the dairy farming of the Po Valley was still considered the most advanced, in both the economic and social sense, in European agriculture, as admired of old by Arthur Young in the late eighteenth century. In Italy, no radical agrarian reform took place even under the fascist regime despite the prevalence of its demagogic slogans pertaining to reform. For postwar Italy we have to note that almost all the leading postwar political parties, from the Christian Democrats Party to the Italian Communist Party, had advocated the creation of landed farmers or owner-cultivators. The anticipations of various influential groups which promoted the agrarian reform of the 1950's of course differed; these anticipations included the overthrow of the traditional agrarian block insisted upon by the leftists, the increase in the agricultural productivity of the backward South and the easing of social tension envisaged by the government, the development of the domestic market and the lowering of the prices of agricultural products called for by industrialists in view of the trends towards European economic integration, and so on. The contents of agrarian reform hence constituted compromise solutions, which were characterised by the following three aspects: (1) Partiality. Reform was carried out only in ten tracts (*comprensori di riforma*) mainly covering the *latifondo* areas of the South. Property owners were allowed to retain one-third of the expropriable portion on condition that they undertook to develop it in accordance with authorised prearranged plans. Also excluded from expropriation were well-organised and efficient farms. (2) Emphasis on increasing agricultural productivity. As mentioned before, lands utilised in intensive agriculture were exempted from expropriation and the public agencies for reform (*enti di riforma*) were charged with the responsibility of providing for land improvement, the construction of infrastructures as well as technical assistance, and cooperatives and education. (3) Small scale of assigned land units. Especially in the South, where pressure on the land was very high, land assignments were made rather for the relief of poverty than for the creation of economically rational units.

In Japan, with the increasing influence of industrialists on the national decision-making process, in the late 1920's the government had already begun to adopt certain measures for the stabilisation of rice prices, for the relief of rural poverty under economic crises and for the creation of owner-cultivators by means of the extension of easy-term credit to prospective tenants. Governmental control of the distribution of agricultural products which was inevitable during World War II, especially where a virtual change from rent in kind to rent in money as the result of governmental intervention in the rice market had remarkably weakened the economic position of landlords. However it was under the occupation of the Allied Forces that agrarian reform in Japan was executed with drastic summariness, the Special Law for the Creation of Owner-cultivators of 1946 being implemented in less than two years. In fact, this reform is often spoken of as the most successful of the reforms of the American occupation. But as Ladejinsky points out, "without underestimating the drive and single-mindedness of the occupation, it should be noted that its principal role was that of a midwife to a healthy reform which had been in its pre-natal stage. The reform idea was Japanese in origin; it was not a policy imposed by a conqueror on the conquered" (Ladejinsky, 1977). Again, "without the bold initiative of the occupation it is certain that no such drastic plan would have been contemplated. But equally, without the drafting skill and experience of

the Japanese officials, an efficient operation of this magnitude could never have been begun. And without the support of public opinion, and the spirit of something like reforming zeal which affected large numbers of rank-and-file agricultural officials, village land secretaries, and Land Committee members, the actual operation of the Law would never have been as thorough as it was" (Dore, 1959). From the diary of the prime minister at that time, Shigeru Yoshida, we are able to ascertain that some leaders of the conservative government party forecasted the socio-political effects of the agrarian reforms in regards to the settlement of rural unrest. Here we can point out three salient traits of agrarian reform in Japan. (1) Thorough redistribution measures, according to which, except for from three- to five-hectare residual possessions for each resident landowner, all tenant farm land all over Japan was expropriated and assigned, generally, to former tenants. Forest and grass lands, which cover about ninety percent of the total rural areas of Japan, were always outside the reform target. (2) Limited to mere land reform, it was called, literally, a "reform of agricultural (arable) lands," and nothing was done as far as reform measures aiming at the increase of agricultural productivity was concerned. After the reform, at least till the beginning of the 1960'S, Japanese agriculture experienced a remarkable development both in land productivity and in labour productivity, because, once they had become owners of the lands they cultivated, Japanese peasants arduously invested their surplus, which formerly passed into the hands of landlords in the form of rent, in land improvement, mechanisation and the introduction of new techniques. But this increased agricultural productivity was merely an indirect effect of the reform, which the promoters of the reform had not in the least expected. (3) Unchanged management scale of farm households, in line with which, except for limited areas of newly reclaimed lands, tenant land generally passed to the ownership of their former tenant-cultivators. No remarkable change occurred in the structure of the farm household scale; thus the omnipresence continued of small- or minuscule-scale farm management in which labour was provided en masse by the members of the families of the owner-cultivators. After the reform, partly because of severe restrictive control of transactions regarding arable lands, partly because of the peasants' attachment to the land and their desire to possess it, and also because of the protective measures regarding tenancy which made landowners reluctant to let land, transactions involving agricultural land and agricultural tenancy contracts were very few in number. The result of this was an increased proportion of part-time farmers and farm households depending greatly on non-agricultural incomes and cultivating their lands mainly for self-consumption. This situation continued throughout the period of Japanese economic growth starting in the late 1950's, a growth owing mainly to the remarkable development of non-agricultural sectors.

The most remarkable consequences of the thoroughgoing land reform that took place in Japan were the extinction of parasitic landlordism and the still-changing social structure of rural areas. The formation of stable specialised farm households or entrepreneurial farm business capable of competing in the international market has not, however, taken place. One of the most important problems of the Japanese economy after the 1950's was the failure to put agriculture on a par with other sectors in terms of income and productivity. The salient expressions of this failure are the rural exodus from marginal areas such as mountainous villages and small isolated islands on the one hand, and the massive part-timerisation of farmers or the extension of subsistence farming in formerly prosperous agricultural areas. Land reform immediately after World War II is not directly responsible for this general

decline of Japanese agriculture but the agrarian reform in Japan which was restricted to land redistribution measures lacked other rationalisation measures necessary in order to adapt Japanese agriculture to the new phase of Japanese capitalism; it does not deserve to be called agrarian reform. Otherwise, we can say, albeit ironically, that the land reform in Japan genuinely contributed to the mobilisation of massive labour forces from agriculture to be utilised in other growing sectors, resulting in the remarkable growth of the national economy in the 1960's.

On the contrary, as a legal measure, the agrarian reform in Italy was certainly partial in character. But it resulted in the virtual destruction of the traditional *latifondo* system in the rural South. The advocacy of the owner-cultivator (*coltivatore diretto*) system that similarly dominated the political sphere of postwar Italy exerted influences also outside the designated reform tracts (*comprensori di riforma*). For instance, in the plain and hilly areas of Central Italy, where the *métayage* predominated, radical changes in this land tenure system have occurred since the late 1950's. The main cause of this decline could be attributed to the exodus of sharecroppers to the industrial and urban areas of Northern Italy and other West European countries. One could point out many other things to explain the decline of the *métayage* in Central Italy such as, for instance, the inadequacy of mixed cultivation (*coltura promiscua*), which was diffused in close connection with the *métayage* system, where modern mechanised agriculture was concerned. We should remark, however, that also contributing markedly to the rapid decline of the *métayage* in Central Italy were the worsening conditions of the sharecropping contracts for the landlords in the postwar period, credit facilities to enable sharecroppers to become owner-cultivators and, finally, the prohibition against stipulating new sharecropping contracts in 1964; all these political, financial and legal measures favoured owner-cultivators and also the capitalistic agricultural enterprises. Officially, these changes were not termed agrarian reform but, actually, they were just that; perhaps the *métayage* areas of Central Italy should collectively represent one of the few examples of areas that have experienced a change in the land tenure system as drastic as this in the past two decades. Thus the partial agrarian reform in Italy has brought about rather wide-ranging social and economic transformations.

Unlike that in Japan, the agrarian reform in Italy has engendered large capitalist farm enterprises. This is the due result of the partial character of its land redistribution measures and also of its emphasis on the development of intensive modern agriculture. We should take into consideration the fact that, in Italy, the capitalist type of farm enterprise, or the junker line, has been firmly rooted from a long time ago. Although acreage was limited, the Italian agrarian reform called into being completely new agricultural landscapes with land improvement works, irrigation networks and processing and marketing facilities.

Agrarian reform in Italy has not succeeded in filling up the productivity gap in agriculture between the North and the South as a measure to resolve the regional disparity between those two parts of Italy. It has been able to do no more than ease somewhat the painful process of decline in the mountain and hill areas of the South. In the vast interior areas of the South, where an archaic type of dry farming is practised, a large number of assigned lots (*podere*) have been abandoned. With the exception of a small proportion of farm households, the majority of *podere* assigned in the course of the agrarian reform are too small in management scale to be eligible to enjoy the common benefits of the agricultural subsidy policies of the EC. While fully aware of the unreasonableness of a comment of this



nature, we can say that, judging from all the above shortcomings, agrarian reform in Italy was realised too late in the day, or that the Italian situation changed too much for it do be able to see the creation of a fully effective agrarian reform.

The Japanese experience of agrarian reform is rather an exception to the rule in the world and perhaps cannot provide many lessons to other countries. But agrarian reforms are needed or have recently taken place over large areas of the Mediterranean countries. As King ascertains, full advantage should be taken by these countries of Italy's rich and valuable land reform experiences, costly though they may have been (King, 1973).

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