

International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 4, 3 1980

International Journal of Urban and Regional Research

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Volume 4, Number 3, 1980



Edward Arnold

ISSN 0309-1317

International Journal of Urban and Regional Research

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Members of the ISA, BSA, ASA, AAG, KNAG
are entitled to subscribe to the 1980 volume at the
special rate of £13.50/US \$30.00

Single issues: UK and overseas £6.50 USA
and Canada US \$16.00

Distributors

UK and overseas

Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd,
41 Bedford Square,
London WC1B 3DQ

USA and Canada

Cambridge University Press,
32 East 57 Street, New York,
New York 10022, USA

International Journal of Urban and
Regional Research (ISSN 0309-1317) is
published quarterly in March, June,
September and December. Application
to mail at second-class postage rates is
pending at New York, New York.
Postmaster: send address changes in
USA and Canada to Cambridge
University Press, 32 East 57 Street, New
York, New York 10022

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41 Bedford Square,
London WC1B 3DQ

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*The journal was founded under the auspices of
the ISA research committee on the sociology of
regional and urban development*

Printed in Great Britain at Whitstable
Litho, Whitstable, Kent

Notes for a study of work organization in Italian agriculture†

by G. Mottura

In recent years, the idea has been gaining ground that it is important to deepen our knowledge and understanding of the 'spontaneous' processes of change that have occurred in the work organization of agriculture.

At the present stage, however, it would perhaps be more correct to speak of an *intuition* rather than an idea. Anyone who sets out to grapple analytically with this mass of problems quite soon recognizes that the state of research is, to say the least, insufficiently advanced. The numerous appeals for preliminary investigations which may be found in the writings of sociologists, anthropologists and agrarian economists, are not matched by an adequate production of data and knowledge, at least as far as the capitalist countries are concerned. The only *partial* exceptions are to be found in the study of French and us agriculture.

This deficiency seems all the more strange if two widely known developments are taken into account. First, there are the broad and interesting advances, both theoretical and practical, which have been made in the study of work organization in the industrial and tertiary sectors; for more than 40 years now, these have constituted an obligatory reference point for economic sociology and related disciplines. Secondly, research into the labour market and its multiple ramifications has gathered momentum over the last 20 years in particular. On many occasions, it has been shown how a better grasp of the current patterns of work organization—those which underlie, in each sector, the quantitative and qualitative aspects of employment, unemployment, underemployment, the level of activity of the population, etc.—can deepen our knowledge of the relations between the dynamics of an individual sector and the dynamics of the socioeconomic formation as a whole.

The present article—which specifically deals with the situation in Italy, although we intend to draw some more general conclusions—is still, as it were, preliminary to a plan of research into these questions of agriculture.

In effect, our aim here is to clarify the conditioning factors which such a research project would have to take into account. (And, as we shall argue, these are *sectoral* conditions, although not in the sense understood by rural

† Original Italian. Translated by Patrick Camiller.

studies.) At an early, preliminary stage, the investigation has to resolve an apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, the difficulty of applying to agriculture a conceptual-instrumental apparatus peculiar to the study of work organization in other productive sectors and, on the other hand, an awareness of the unified logic which, although articulated in a multiplicity of partial interrelations, may be found at both the origin and the heart of every socially significant phenomenon or process in a given socioeconomic formation.

To be more explicit, this short contribution will discuss the general problem of the conditions that have to be met if studies recognized as important in one sectoral field are to produce knowledge which is useful for a more complete analysis of the dynamic of class relations in society as a whole.

As far as agriculture is concerned, this kind of approach has proved useful both for investigations into the social roots and consequences of agrarian policies (or of state intervention), and above all for those studies of the labour market and the structure of employment which we have already mentioned. (At least in Italy, however, the fact that agrarian economists have mainly been business-oriented—despite such illustrious predecessors as Arrigo Serpiari, and the more recent work of Manlio Rossi-Doria—has kept labour-market studies over the last 30 years as an almost exclusive preserve of sociologists.)

In both these strands of analysis, one thing is certain. No phenomenon or process relevant to the study of agriculture (whether it be the growing mechanization of activity; mechanisms for marketing goods; changes in the agricultural family; trends in the composition of the work-force according to sex, age and occupational status; migration flows; the effects of various measures of state intervention; the characteristics of the property market; or the various institutions and conflicts involved) can be adequately investigated and interpreted if the frame of reference used by the research worker is *confined* to the agricultural sector; if, in other words, he does not bring out *the specific role or roles* assigned to *this* agriculture in *this* overall system, and the totality of economic, cultural, institutional, political and other interrelations that are bound up with it.

It is also clear—and now we are drawing closer to our main concern—that precisely because such an approach centres on *interrelationships*, considering them above all in the light of *class relations*, we cannot simply *deduce* the concrete historical and social conditions under which a problem is posed at the level of a given sector. This warning would seem to apply mainly to the notion of *an internally stratified class existing at the level of an overall socio-historical formation*.

In the sphere with which this article is concerned, such a notion is further complicated by the fact that the implied identification and classification of social and socio-occupational factors requires us first to clarify the following three kinds of question which, in the literature of agrarian economics, are usually subsumed under the heading, *the structural dualism* of agriculture.

a) With regard to the physical and technical limitations upon production, agricultural activity takes place in extremely heterogeneous geographical regions; these may be roughly grouped under two broad categories that we shall provisionally term *the centre* (plains and low hills) and *the periphery* (high hills and mountains).

b) In agriculture, a multiplicity of entrepreneurial forms coexist with one another; and each of these is in turn subject to profound quantitative and qualitative differentiation, according to organizational structure, techniques, size, relationship to the market, and form of management and ownership. However, all this diversity may also be placed under two fundamental types which, until they are further specified, we shall term *the capitalist farm* and *the peasant farm*.

c) Distributed across the rather broad socio-occupational spectrum are the figures of *the farmer* (whose precise role is normally bound up with type of landownership, performance or non-performance of manual labour, etc.); *the manual labour* (whose role varies, for instance, with the power to make decisions over the basic production process); and *the wage-worker* (who is graded, above all, according to the type of farm on which he works, the length of time during which he remains on a particular farm, the kind of duties to which he may be assigned, and so on).

We may provisionally state that each of the first two figures is in turn polarized between two basic types. We shall call these *the entrepreneur* and *the peasant* in the case of the farmer; *the independent worker* and *the dependent worker* in the case of the manual labourer. As to *wage-workers*, it may be better at this stage not to suggest any polar classification, since it would inevitably appear forced.

Two further remarks should be made before we conclude this introduction.

First, as we shall see later, at least one other general criterion of classification is assuming more and more importance, such that it interferes with those given above and forces us to divide the basic types into two distinct groups. This criterion involves the distinction between *full-time workers* and *part-time workers* in agriculture (and/or on a given farm).

Secondly—and we shall also return to this point—it should be borne in mind that the multiplicity of social figures making up each of the above types may also be seen in terms of the concrete coexistence, according to the same definition, of diverse functional/structural positions—either for long periods of time or for the duration of an agrarian year, understood as the sum of various ‘work calendars’. *First example*, at certain phases in the evolution of a socioeconomic system, *farmer* may become a category embracing a significant proportion of *the latent and stagnant surplus population*. Or, at the other end of the spectrum, a good part of the wage-earning labour force may, during the course of the year, oscillate between *the army of active workers* and *the industrial reserve army*.

In any case, given these premises, we can see which features of Italian agriculture have to be taken into account by anyone wishing to embark upon

research into the organization of work in this sector. Following the order we have so far outlined, we shall first of all consider a little more closely the differentiation of agriculture according to region and structure of production. We shall then go on to examine the processes which have affected the labour market and the structure of employment, and which have also posed crucial problems relating to the mechanisms of classification.

I Regional differences

As we have already indicated, Italian agriculture appears to the observer as an exceptionally variegated activity. A multiplicity of factors has played and continues to play a role in its heterogeneity which, though common to the agriculture of nearly every capitalist country, it is more marked in the case of Italy. To be considered first are the historical factors bound up with Italy's relative 'youth' as a unified national system: not only the classical distinction between north, centre and south, but still more the extent to which present-day administrative regions—even when they are contiguous and relatively similar in their physical conditions—nevertheless exhibit persistent differences with regard to their crop pattern, entrepreneurial structure (size, technical structure, economic behaviour), system of ownership, institutionalized forms of contract, models of rural settlement, and so on. The complexity of these relations is such that we cannot here enter into these problems in sufficient detail to avoid simply repeating what has already been widely documented. We shall therefore merely point out that a plan of research along the lines indicated above would have to lay appropriate emphasis on the continuing structural importance of the historical dimension—even if the researcher did not choose the path of *genetic explanation*.

Passing instead to what we have called *regional differences*, we should note that these allow us to break down the agricultural land surface into a number of relatively homogeneous areas or zones, whose contours now coincide and now intersect with those of the administrative regions.

The provisional distinction which we adopted earlier referred exclusively to physical features (lowland, mountain, hills) and implicitly to the climatic, geological and pedological factors normally bound up with them.

It should be noted, however, that the last three factors may serve as elements of further differentiation within each area, even under conditions of geographic contiguity. And this differentiation may in turn be accentuated by differing bases of economic activity.

It is well known, for example, that the twentieth-century evolution of the Italian economy (particularly during the 30 years following the second world war) has led to an ever more marked differentiation between, on the one hand, the plains and low-lying hills as *central areas* of economic development and, on the other hand, the mountains and high hills as *peripheral areas*.

However, there is more to be said in this connection. As various sources have observed, the dynamics of 'the periphery' are strictly correlated, at the very heart of the development process, with the dynamics of 'the centre'. To take just one example, it would be hard to interpret farming activity in a mountainous zone like the Appenine chain, if we took no account of the many-sided relations that exist between the various parts of this chain and the areas of hill and lowland adjacent to them. (It could be shown that the converse is also true.)

Obviously, height and other spatial considerations are not sufficient to account for the characteristics of social and economic processes—indeed, we should be alive to the conservative, ideological use often made of such explanations in Italy. Still, this should not blind us to the fact that such considerations throw light on some initial factors of disequilibrium, whose cumulative effects have helped to produce situations with highly differentiated economic, social and demographic structures. *And corresponding to these is a diversified organization of agricultural labour and production, both at farm level and at the level of the sector as a whole.*

Let us further illustrate this point by examining a little more closely, albeit briefly, two area types that we have already identified: the centre and the periphery.

In the official sources, mountainous zones are defined in terms of the type of land, its gradient and altitude, and the prevailing climate and rainfall conditions. Along with these factors, which, in a given state of technology, largely determine production choices, two other data are generally considered relevant to the situation of agriculture in such zones: namely, the level of infrastructure and services, and the level of industrial development, both of which are often much more modest than in the plains and low hilly regions.

In the zones of mountains and high hills, the great majority of farms are small or very small in size—often split into a number of non-contiguous plots, yet incapable of ensuring average levels of employment for those who run them. Thus, the whole set of factors mentioned above has a marked influence upon the zonal employment structure, which in turn has a kind of 'boomerang' effect on the 'choices' open to the farm. A clear example is the still inadequately studied differences between the forms of part-time employment more and more often found in such areas, and those which are just as frequently encountered in the lowlands.

These differences may refer to the range of *alternative or supplementary opportunities that are available*. (Thus, in mountainous zones, above all but not exclusively in the south, it is much more often the case that a 'second job' consists of precarious, irregular, unprotected and unskilled employment, whether in agriculture, industry or the tertiary sector.) But they may also refer to *the distances that have to be covered* (for the practice of commuting in outlying areas involves such long journeys that it takes on a weekly rhythm, or even crosses the threshold of seasonal or periodic migration); or to *the*

amount and utilization of earnings from a second job. Only in specific areas and situations, usually bound up with major tourist development or with market conditions for certain products, is it possible to use other means to distinguish between 'rich' and 'poor' part-time workers—a distinction which, in central areas, is crucial for understanding this phenomenon. However, in the first type of region, earnings from non-farm or non-agricultural work are much less frequently reinvested in the farm rather than earmarked for family consumption or savings.

Now, it is *everywhere* true that if a farmer or one or more members of a farming family engage in outside work, this will have a definite influence on the options relating to the farm in question. It will inevitably have an effect, too, upon the organization of work. In those areas where the available force of *wage-workers* also habitually takes on non-agricultural work, the way in which the question is posed will be somewhat different. Nevertheless, the range of concrete solutions to which such factors give rise will be quite broad in *the central areas* and quite narrow in *the peripheral ones*.

In these peripheral areas, with the exceptions that have been noted, most habitual part-time work seems to be bound up with conditions of *pauperization* or *proletarianization* (categories that are obviously not identical, even if they are sometimes interconnected). In a certain number of cases, moreover, part-time work has either proved to be a first step towards migration from the land or towards marginalization; or else it has resulted from a more or less forced return to the land as a result of this latter factor.

In the areas of plains and low hills, by contrast, part-time work involves solutions which, *from the point of view of the farm* (and abstracted from the division between 'rich' and 'poor' part-timers), may be schematically expressed as follows.

a) Farms in which productive and technical decisions seem to be clearly subordinate to the opportunities for outside work available in the region.

b) Farms in which this consideration, though important, is balanced and conditioned by the concrete opportunity for improving farm revenue (e.g. through a particular choice of crops corresponding to an exceptionally buoyant market).

c) Farms in which the decision to send people out to work is strictly subordinate to satisfaction of the demand originating in the choice of crops and techniques. If, in this case, members of the family become part-time workers, the choice may be rooted either in an overabundance of family labour, or in the fact that the income obtainable from outside work is significantly higher than the cost in wages of partially replacing them with non-family labourers.

A few final points should be made in order to complete this rapid survey of the elements which, for present purposes, are significant in differentiating the two types of area.

In *the central zones*—however strange it may seem at first sight—a broader range of production choices goes together with a much more highly

specialized organization of farm production. As we shall see, this combination is to be explained by its correspondence to a more marked zonal diversity of so-called 'specialisms', and to a situation in which the size of the average farm is both economically and physically much larger, enabling it to bring its operations more rapidly into line with technical and market developments. All these circumstances entail that the demand for wage-labour of both capitalist and peasant farms is quantitatively lower (in relation to the scale of production) than it is in other zones. It is no accident, therefore, that the biggest concentrations of agricultural wage-labour are in the less developed farming regions, while in the more developed areas the phenomenon of outside contractors is assuming more and more importance.

II Differences in the structure of production

As we said in the introductory section, two basic types of farm are present, although unequally so, in the agricultural areas of Italy.

a) *The capitalist farm*, which is most widespread in the lowlands and, in particular, the well-watered lowlands, is largely based on the employment of wage-labour and a substantial capital investment. Its surface area is usually greater than that of the average farm in the region.

b) *The peasant farm*, although present in the lowlands, is clearly predominant in hilly and mountainous zones. Its form is more or less overwhelmingly determined by the contradiction between the availability of land and the availability of family labour-power.

Let us now go beyond this first, general distinction, keeping in mind our observations on the role played within the two basic types by *central/peripheral* location and *full/part-time* activity. In this way, we shall seek to gain a better understanding of the most important articulations of the two basic types.

Let us begin with some statistics on peasant holdings. According to official sources, about 60% of peasant farms absorb less than one person's annual labour per year. A little under a third of farms generate a demand of less than 50 days of labour per annum. Only about a fifth of farms provide work for roughly two people, and only 9-10% have a higher average annual work-load.

If we take into account the nature of the average family unit, then these figures give a precise indication of the reasons why part-time work is constantly expanding on peasant farms. In relation to such holdings in the south, for example, reliable calculations based on ISTAT and INEA data for recent years set the level of part-time farming (or of *farm underemployment*) between 50% (Abruzzi and Molise) and 80-90% (Calabria and Apulia).

It has become customary to pigeon-hole such data under the vague heading of *the southern question*. In order to forestall this, it may be useful to

point out that, while the figures for the first three (predominantly mountainous) regions certainly refer to the characteristic problems of the *peripheral zones*, those for Apulia bring out the contradictions, or at least the difficulties, which mark the existence of peasant farms in the strongest areas of the capitalist development of agriculture.

If, still referring to the south, we then distinguish between rich farming zones of well-watered lowland and the largely dry farming zones of hilly and mountainous land, we shall be able to see more clearly what these ISTAT data have to tell us. In the lowlands, only 50% of farms directly managed by a farmer or run on share-cropping lines actually have a full-time farmer; and only in about 7% of farms does the farmer both have another economic activity and register it as *secondary*. It should be borne in mind, however, that in the 40% or so of remaining cases—those in which work on his own farm represents a secondary occupation for the farmer—an important number are nevertheless *exclusively occupied in agriculture*.

In the hilly and mountainous zones, the percentage of similar farms on which the landholder is occupied full time is somewhat higher at about 60%. But the main difference is that, in the majority of other cases, he is employed in *non-agricultural* activity: in the building industry, in forestry work and on public works in general; or else he is a temporary emigrant.

Of course, the figures vary when we move from the south to areas in the centre, northeast and northwest of the country. But it is significant that the most marked differences are not to be found in the top-ranking peasant farms (although in some areas—for example, Emilia Romagna and the Lombardy Plain—the increasing use of outside contractors with their own fleet of machines, has a visible effect upon structure and organization); rather, they appear in farms with smaller economic and/or physical dimensions, particularly if they are situated in *marginal zones*. Quite clearly, the differences here concern the broader range of secondary job openings: not predominantly for agricultural work, but to a much larger degree for *supervised industrial work*, with its characteristic features of regularity and, so to speak, *institutionalization* of the most diffuse forms of side-employment (e.g., home-based work or the seasonal jobs related to tourism in the peasant belts of Emilia Romagna, Veneto and the Marches).

We now turn to the structure of the capitalist sector of agriculture. The brief points made earlier focused on three characteristics: the absolute predominance of wage-labour; a high degree of capital investment, and a surface area usually greater than the regional average. Such farms are mainly situated in the lowlands and hilly regions, and may themselves be differentiated according to the sociogeographical area in which they are located. Certain corollaries of this latter point will become clearer when we go on to deal with the structure of employment. But let us straightaway try to identify some of the more widespread forms, and illustrate their salient features. For this purpose, it seems useful to focus attention on three distinct models that are often referred to by agrarian economists.

1 *'Traditional' capitalist farms*

These are chiefly located in the areas of well-watered lowland, and are highly (although not exclusively) concentrated in the south of the country. In general, resulting from the modernization of old-type capitalist structures, they have gained particular impetus in the south through the establishment of new undertakings based on old estates—a process which, at various stages (after the first world war, after the collapse of fascism) profited either from the huge, state-directed transfer of resources (reclamation and irrigation works, the greater availability of direct and indirect finances, and so on) or from the consequent mobilization of the property market.

These farms are normally of quite considerable size: for instance, on the plain of Sihari (a well-watered area of Calabria which, in its time, was partly affected by the land reform), 70% of the surface area is occupied by 50% of the undertakings, with an average size of 230 hectares. But although they are tending towards more specialized lines of production, such farms do not seem inclined to make great organizational or technological changes. One of their characteristic aims, particularly common in the south, is to foster the growth of peasant farm-belts from which they can draw much of the necessary seasonal labour.

2 *'Backward' or declining capitalist farms*

These units, which are relatively small in size and based on absentee management, are not capable of adjusting to changes in organization, technique and marketing within the agricultural sector. Present in both central and peripheral zones, they seem to constitute a transitional stage either towards partial absorption by the most dynamic farms (above all in the well-watered lowlands) or towards progressive abandonment over a varying length of time (above all in the peripheral zones). It has been estimated that they make up 25% of the total number of capitalist farms.

It should be stressed that the official data often make it difficult to analyse the specialization of production in such cases. It should also be stressed that this category covers many former tenant-farms which, given the landlord's fear of renting them out or otherwise releasing them, may be regarded as in a state of 'frozen expectation' of another future.

3 *'Dynamic' capitalist farms*

We may group together under this heading three distinct forms. The first may be defined as 'speculative' and 'ephemeral' undertakings. These include speculative cattle-fattening centres which spring up in periods when the market is favourable and ephemeral farms (mainly but not exclusively horticultural) which operate on rented land usually for less than a year, seeking to produce one or more short-cycle crops (often in greenhouses) that

are then directly marketed by the entrepreneur. The temporary character and spatial mobility of the undertakings are reflected in the lack of fixed investment and—more relevant to us here—in the precariousness of the jobs so created. (Once again, it is not rare for labour to be drawn from the surrounding farms rather than the normal employment channels, or, in the second case, to be provided by the very families which rent out the land.)

The second form comprises farms with 'a particularly advanced structure', mostly dependent upon public or private finance groups whose operations and interests go beyond the frontiers of the agricultural sector. It is interesting to note that these farms, which have long had privileged access to technology, finance and markets, still seem to be growing in Italy, although even today there is insufficient data concerning them. As we shall see, the occupational structure of these farming concerns is characterized by the partial recourse to 'outside contractors'; the prevalence of fixed employment; the sporadic allocation of marginal, short-term jobs to casual employees.

The third and last form of undertaking that we should mention here is the various *joint forms of management*, ranging from the ordinary company to the cooperative. In this case, too, we feel the need for deeper investigation, since many undertakings have now acquired considerable economic dimensions. We may note that, besides making it possible to overcome many of the problems associated with the property market, such forms exhibit above average levels of technology. Only partly justified, however, seems to be the current view that they provide favourable conditions for the maintenance of employment levels.

III The labour market and the structure of employment

The specific feature of the various areas and farm-types, which we have examined in the preceding pages, should be related to the characteristics of the agricultural labour market and to the tendencies that have affected it, especially during the last twenty years.

In general terms, though, we have to ask whether an *agricultural labour market* really exists in the true sense—one whose trends and peculiarities may be analysed without excessive oversimplification, the principal frame of reference being the dynamic of agricultural structures and the relations of production in agriculture. We shall simply assume as given that, in the case of Italy for the period that concerns us here, such a statement cannot be verified with regard either to the agricultural sector as a whole, or to the various branches, divisions and categories into which it may be broken down.

In the last 30 years, in fact, both the *supply* trends (variations in the active farming population, its sex and age composition, its regional distribution, and so on) and the *demand* trends (variations in the level and structure of

employment, and in the different farm-categories however defined) appear to have been largely *exogenous* to the sector. In other words, they have been more or less direct expressions of the role played by agriculture within the economic system as a whole (and within the economic policy guidelines that have inspired state intervention in the sector).

Between 1951 and 1976, the total number of persons engaged in agriculture fell from 8 640 000 (43.8% of the active population) to 2 290 000 (or about 15.3%). However, this decrease was not evenly distributed among the various subperiods, and so as late as 1959 34% of the active population was still so employed.

Furthermore, a simple focus on total numbers employed leads us to underestimate the rate at which agricultural employment has declined. For it obscures another phenomenon that is also important in this regard: namely, the decline in the number of work-days actually performed by each worker in agriculture. Turning aside for the moment from the structure of wage-employment, we can find statistical evidence of this both in the growth of second jobs (which, as we have seen, does not involve only those layers of *poor peasants* to whom it is often restricted), and in the frequent overlap between predominantly peasant zones and the areas in which home-based work and other forms of unsupervised labour are expanding.

The broad framework of the changes that have occurred in agriculture since the years of the 'economic miracle' is already known from comparative studies of the last two agricultural census reports. Most importantly, it has emerged that the figures concerning the constant drain of agricultural manpower between 1951 and 1971 should be related to the varying significance and direction of rural emigration during the different subperiods.

Thus, in the years between 1951 and 1958, when the state's agricultural spending policy was mainly geared to sustaining the farm-unit and financing large-scale works of reclamation and irrigation and other infrastructural activity, the drop in employment (-19.2%) did not significantly alter the overall structure of agricultural employment. The *peasant*, whether or not he owned the land which he farmed (as did some 75% of the total number), was still by far the predominant figure; and the rural exodus, above all in the south, appeared more as a rise in temporary secondary employment (on building or forestry work, for example) than as a clear withdrawal from agriculture.

During the 'boom' years (1959-63), by contrast, the drift from the countryside reached its peak (-27.9%) and was above all due to the markedly rising demand for industrial manpower, both in Italy and in other European countries. The workers who, this time, really were sucked out of the agricultural sector, were those with the most unstable employment, the lowest incomes, and the greatest dependence on public works expenditure, or else those who were tied to excessively onerous land contracts (sharecroppers, for example).

These changes sharply altered the structure of employment: both in the economic system as a whole (where, for the first time, industry took the lead over other sectors in terms of the total number employed) and, more specifically, in the agricultural sector (where *dependent workers* started to become a growing proportion of the total, where the phenomenon of 'feminization' appeared among certain sectors of the peasantry, and so on).

From the end of the 'miracle' to the mid-seventies (1964-74), the significance of the rural exodus seemed to change once more. The 'attraction effect' of the demand for non-agricultural labour was replaced by a 'combined attraction/repulsion effect'. For the *attraction effect*, which had originated in the industrial and service sectors of other European countries—strong migratory flows, albeit marked by a high turnover, took place above all from the fifties until the late sixties—began to slacken during this period, and to combine with a *repulsion effect* that stemmed from changes in the agricultural sector itself. This sector was now the scene of intense capitalist restructuring, no longer moderated by state intervention (although there are many examples that do not conform to the pattern); and the resulting expulsion of manpower went ahead *independently* of the falling demand for labour in Italian industry.

In this way, the changes in the structure of agricultural employment became still more marked. Between 1961 and 1974, dependent agricultural workers increased their share of employment in this sector from about 27% to about 38%: for while some two-and-a-half million units were being lost, the number of farm-hands and wage-workers fell by about half-a-million. Particularly in the case of dependent workers, however, quantitative data do not by themselves give an adequate picture of the changed position of this group, subject as it has been both to changes in occupational composition (above all in the *globally* more developed areas) and to marked tendencies towards various kinds of spatial dislocation (the growing concentration of dependent workers in the *globally* less developed areas).

In the last few years (1976-78), the most conspicuous phenomenon has been the gradual slackening of the rural exodus, to a point where the trend has actually been reversed. In order to grasp the significance of this for the structure of employment, we need to look separately at *independent workers* (including family helpers) and *dependent workers*. It appears that the increase has occurred entirely among the former, and that the number of the latter has remained substantially unchanged.

However, we can also observe that this increase is really a balance between two opposing movements: a slight fall in the number of *full-time* independent workers, and a marked rise in the ISTAT category of 'others working in this sector'.

Important changes have also occurred among dependent workers, even though the situation appears static from a quantitative point of view. In particular, the wage-earning labour force has tended to cluster more sharply around the two poles of *fixed* and *casual* labour.

From the rather unsystematic knowledge at our disposal, there seem to be

good grounds for saying that this trend corresponds to two developments within part of the capitalist sector: namely, a rising demand for workers who can be employed on some kind of mechanical equipment; and a growing occasional use of unskilled labour for work which has not yet been mechanized, or whose nature and/or frequency do not justify the investments required for mechanization.

It should be noted, however, that 70% of the wage-earning labour force is concentrated in the south—a fact which, though not necessarily contradicting the above hypothesis, once again confirms the importance of studying farms in relation to the geographic area in which they are located (including the significant function of the labour market). Finally, and without intending here to go into any great detail, we should remember that the specific structure of agricultural employment (in both its quantitative and qualitative aspects, referring to the composition and geographic distribution of those employed, and to the annual work-cycle) has an obvious impact on the way in which the problem of hiring-and-firing is posed in this sector.

It is well known that this has been the cause of continuing tension. Italian history, from national unification to the present day, provides a large number of examples, many of which have had considerable resonance beyond the agricultural sector and the social groups directly involved in it.

A constant feature of such struggles in Italy has been what we might call their *associative* nature. They have usually been initiated by the least secure groups in the wage-earning labour force, who conceive of them as not just struggles to wrest powerful instruments of control and coercion from the hands of the employers, but also as *a possible means for gaining higher levels of employment*. Precisely because of this second aspect, such struggles have quite often forged concrete links with sections of the peasantry; with those who, weighed down by the oppressive burden of ground-rent, have taken up the fight for land; and, even more frequently, with those who, while not being so directly underprivileged, have been concerned to alter the conditions and contractual ties affecting the security of the farms they run.

This particularly 'dramatic' character of the problem of agricultural employment, as well as its potential for associative action, seems to be rooted in a tendency which, though variously articulated at different stages, has continually marked this sector in capitalist economic systems.

It has often been shown that there is a general tendency constantly to reduce the amount of labour-power which has to be employed in manual work. In agriculture, above all during the periods of major capitalist development, this reduction does not manifest itself as relative or proportional to the scale of production (as it may do in other sectors) but appears as an *absolute* tendency. And it will be clear from what has been said so far, that this peculiarity concerns not only the more or less temporary wage-earning labour force, but also every type of farmer (whether he owns the land or is tied to some lease agreement); and that, even when the danger is not yet actual, this tendency of capitalist agriculture continually threatens

the farmer with a declassing process (in terms of status and income) and, at the outer limit, with pauperization or proletarianization.

IV Provisional conclusions

We said in the introduction that these notes would not enter into specific recommendations for the study of work organization in Italian agriculture, and that they would rather seek to establish very briefly what must be known if our research is not just to be a reductionist application of schemas currently used for industry and the tertiary sector. Following others, we might say that these notes have merely defined the *background* and illustrated some of its components, without going into the question of *results*.

Taken as a whole, however, the elements contained in this article do seem to justify us in advancing a little further. We shall therefore try to suggest some lines of research that appear especially fruitful.

First, we already seem to have established that such a line of research must take into account the regional and structural differences specific to the agricultural sector; and that it would therefore have to base itself on a *farm-typology* which adequately expressed the fundamental dichotomy between peasant and capitalist farms.

Secondly, it also seems clear that the basic criteria—those which would allow such a classification to be fruitfully applied—are in the last analysis as follows: a) the situation with regard to the labour market; b) the type of labour employed; c) the division of labour within the production process, and the extent to which the services of outside firms are employed, if at all; d) the position on the means-of-production market; and e) the position on the product market.

Furthermore, if these criteria are not to operate in a distorted manner, we must take into account not only the farm's geographical location, but also *the product or products* in which it specializes. It would thus be necessary to reconstruct the technical characteristics of the production process in question, broken down at least into its different phases, if not into individual operations. In this way, farms might be subdivided into, for example: *single-product farms, mixed-product farms*, and those turning out groups of products.

Lastly, and although it may seem distant from our subject, this provisional conclusion should stress the importance of integrating another factor into the analysis—not merely as a decorative political appendix, but as a factor that is itself of structural significance. We are referring to those institutions (e.g. the Federconsorzi, with their multiple ramifications) which act both as private economic and political organizations, and as bodies which allocate public expenditure. They have been of crucial importance not only for the resurgence of the dualist model of agriculture after the immediate postwar period, but also in the formulation of state intervention. Indeed, it is as a

result of such programmes that Italian agriculture, apart from being the principal reservoir of manpower for capitalist development, has become one of the chief sources of finance for industrial development and one of the political bases for the conservative forces that have ruled Italy for the last 30 years.

In a recent issue of an influential Italian scientific journal, an agrarian economist made an interesting contribution to the ongoing debate about structural dualism in agriculture. 'Faced with phenomena like the dualism in agriculture,' he wrote, 'in which sociocultural and political elements play a determining role, any true generalization would perhaps have to include these variables in the model, with all the difficulties that such a procedure still involves (unless, that is, we resort to schemas which, being highly ideological, are often rather simplistic). Strictly economic models, which tend to explain phenomena *from within* (and which are the only ones at our disposal) often seem insufficient for the task of total explanation.'

Probably only someone who has worked for the last 20 years as a sociologist of the phenomena and processes operative in agricultural areas can fully appreciate the fact that a well-known Italian agrarian economist has written these lines. We hope, perhaps with justification, that they are the sign of a thorough reconsideration of the role of the social sciences in this sector—sciences which, on the whole, have tended to be dominated by sectional interests.

University of Modena, Italy

Acknowledgement

For the section on the structural characteristics of Italian agriculture, we are greatly indebted to the suggestions of Dr Marcello Gorgoni, a research worker at the Centre for Specialized Study of the Agrarian Economy of the South, The Faculty of Agrarian Studies, Portici (Naples).

Cet article discute et présente les différentes formes d'organisation du travail dans l'agriculture italienne et les classe en fonction de la région, du type des formes de propriété, et du statut des travailleurs (à plein temps ou mi-temps). La différenciation de l'agriculture en fonction de la région et de la structure de production est abordée, et la typologie des exploitations que est présentée est discutée en fonction des changements du marché de la main d'œuvre agricole.

Diese Abhandlung enthält eine einführende Diskussion der unterschiedlichen Formen der Arbeitsorganisation in der italienischen Landwirtschaft in bezug auf den Standort der landwirtschaftlichen Betriebe, die verschiedenen Arten der Unternehmensform und die Ganz- oder Teilzeitbeschäftigung der Arbeiter. Die Landwirtschaft wird nach regionalem Bereich und Produktionsstruktur differenziert und es wird eine Typologie der landwirtschaftlichen Betriebe aufgestellt, die dann zu Änderungen auf dem landwirtschaftlichen Arbeitsmarkt in Bezug gesetzt wird.

Esta ponencia provee un debate de introducción a las diversas formas de organizar el trabajo en la agricultura italiana, relacionándolas a la ubicación de las granjas, los tipos de empresa y a la situación de los trabajadores, si son a pleno tiempo o no. Se considera la diferenciación de la agricultura según la región y la estructura productiva, desarrollándose una tipología de granjas que se relaciona entonces a los cambios en el mercado de mano de obra agrícola.

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