

Land and Labor in Europe 1900-1950



FOLKE DOVRING



LAND AND LABOR IN EUROPE 1900—1950

STUDIES
IN SOCIAL LIFE
IV

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LAND AND LABOR
IN EUROPE
1900 - 1950

A COMPARATIVE SURVEY OF RECENT AGRARIAN HISTORY

by

FOLKE DOVRING

WITH A CHAPTER ON
LAND REFORM AS A PROPAGANDA THEME

by

KARIN DOVRING

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PREFACE

This book is the outcome of research which was initiated in the fall of 1951. My research in agrarian history of past centuries in Continental Western Europe and Scandinavia had focussed my attention on the entanglement of things old and new in the rural world. It also made me feel the lack of a comprehensive survey of modern agrarian problems. An attempt to synthesize the most recent experiences in the field of the land question in the light of a half century's history could not have been started until the main lines of the political behavior in post-war Europe had become somewhat stabilized. It is only recently that statistical material referring to the situation around 1950 has become available from most countries in Europe. The lacunas remaining in this respect might to some extent have been filled if the publication of the volume were to have been postponed. This, on the other hand, would have made the bulk of the results less up to date than they are now.

In the initial stage the enquiry was supported by a travel grant from the Swedish State Council for Social Research. During seven months' travel over large parts of Southern and Continental Europe many governmental offices, institutions, politicians, and scholars, gave precious help in finding facts and information about agrarian situations and policies in their countries. They also largely helped in establishing invaluable contacts with local technicians and with different strata of the farming population. The generous hospitality I met everywhere was both helpful and charming.

For this book my work in the service of the United Nations' Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome has been a source of great inspiration. The interest shown by my chiefs and colleagues at these institutions and ample exchanges of

views with them have helped me forward with my work. I am specially thankful to Mr D. K. Britton of FAO/ECE, Geneva.

A one-year fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation of New York made possible a period of concentrated activity on this book. A special grant allowed the employment of a computing assistant for three months who carried out part of the computations underlying the tables in Chapter 3. Apart from this assistance all the research for chapters 1 through 6 has been done entirely by myself.

The research for the seventh chapter has been done by its author, Dr Karin Dovring under discussions with Professor Harold D. Lasswell of Yale University who attentively followed her work and read it in manuscript and proofs.

Mr R. A. Bishop and Mr L. Lind of FAO, Rome, have kindly advised me on my English and helped checking the proofs.

I am grateful to them all.

Rome, October 1955

Folke Dovring

INTRODUCTION

THE LAND QUESTION

(1) Ever since the eighteenth century brought human social conditions under serious discussion, the land question has been one of the basic issues of any program for social and economic reforms. It has been looked at under almost all conceivable aspects, but in practically all socio-economic systems it retains its fundamental importance and originality. It has proved difficult to fit into general theoretical conceptions and always seems to call for special treatment. Some schools of thought, for example the Physiocrats and Georgeists, regard land as the basic source of human wealth; others look upon agriculture as the most important among the factors which retard progress. Individual ownership of land is one of the most important principles of Roman law and Liberal economic thought; other systems regard it as a theft from the community. Whichever the underlying general views were, most land policies have failed, more or less, to reach the goals set for them. Under the changing conditions of modern times, the land question shows itself in a new light, a continually changing riddle provoking new controversies.

(2) As well as focussing interest upon social agrarian structure, we must keep in mind some of the basic economic issues. Social structure is here understood mainly as the stratification and organization of economic wealth and economic power. The traditional main factors were land and labor. On a stage of higher economic development, invested capital contributes to complicating the relationship between the two. Even so, a conjunction of land and labor is always fundamental for agricultural wealth. The organization of land in relation to labor and vice versa forms the core of social agrarian structure, and its development is the essential content of social agrarian history.

(3) The land question is not only a matter of distribution of economic wealth. It is as much one of economic power, which is basic in relation to economic wealth. The question of organization and decision-making in agrarian society is part of the general socio-economic problems of our days and is involved in the ideological debate around these. Large and small enterprise, individualism and common action, rights, duties and responsibilities of the individual, all this is debated as hotly as ever. A growing conviction that the choice is one of degree rather than of principle does not make the choice any easier or less loaded with sentiment. Socialism and Communism, as well as various Neo-Liberal and Neo-Conservative trends of thought, all tend to put different stress on economic, social and human values.

In the ideological debate there is a tendency to concentrate upon the urban-rural contrast, often conceived as representing the contrast between handicraft and urban-industrial ways of production. Socialism took the urban-industrial process of production as a point of departure, passing judgment on both agriculture and economic life as a whole on the assumption that the same mechanical requirement of organization into large units applied to both. Some of its modern opponents in thought and policy, on the other hand, tend to start from the rural way of living with its extremely familistic pattern of life. While Communist land policy strives to make farming industry operate in large enterprises, there are, in opposition, those who would like to maintain as much as possible of urban handicraft and even decentralize manufacturing industries into something akin to a family farm structure. As far as urban industries are concerned, this sort of organization is rarely achieved. It is in the realm of agriculture that the debate really influences practice. Thus, the rural milieu becomes a battleground for contrasting social and human ideals. The family enterprise is a general social program but derives its validity mainly from agrarian realities. The big industrial enterprise, with its vast hierarchy of decision-making among directors and employees, on the other hand, is mainly an urban reality, resulting from modern development of manufacturing industries. Thus, two distinct historical strata of human life stand one against the other and claim that between them lies the decision for the future of mankind. This is one of

the reasons why agrarian problems are basic to any discussion of social problems even in modern Europe. Another reason lies in the still considerable size of the agrarian sector in most countries, even in many of those in Europe.

(4) It is difficult to say how far a scientific analysis can modify basic political conceptions of what human life should be. Political decisions will always in the last instance be taken from considerations of values, in themselves profoundly irrational. The task of the scientist is not to advise or convert but to contribute to showing more clearly than before what the consequence will be of the alternatives discussed. Our scope here is not to advocate a definite program of action. We hope instead to contribute to making adherents of different programs see more clearly than before the real nature of their assumptions. Perhaps even, for some readers, the choice between old controversial solutions may become obsolete and give way to a re-formulation of the problem. However striking the contrast may seem to be between two historical strata of society, it may not always have the significance the ideologies tend to ascribe to it. A survey of Europe, on an historical and comparative basis, may throw some new light on the land question. The conclusions are likely to be of interest even outside our continent.

AN HISTORICAL APPROACH

(5) Sometimes, the most important thing about a problem is not so much its status as its trend of development. A situation may be full of difficulties and nevertheless be left alone, if it shows distinct signs of improving by itself. Another situation, though for the moment no worse, may call for urgent measures if it tends to deteriorate gravely. This is only one of the general reasons for a short-term historical approach to problems of social and economic policy. A reason for a long-term historical outlook lies, and in Europe no less than elsewhere, in the presence of different historical strata side by side in the actual situation of today. Not only does rural society develop slower than urban society, but perhaps even more striking are the disparities within rural development. European rural areas show many lingering relics of past centuries, more or less interwoven with quite modern

features. This is a powerful factor in rural psychology, making the reaction to modern development not only often retarded but sometimes also paradoxical. Even in highly developed areas, it is well established that it takes at least a generation for a change to penetrate the countryside. In this book, the attempt will be made to describe agrarian structure in Europe since around 1900. The more general and remote historical background will be kept in mind, when useful and possible.

(6) Another reason for an historical approach to modern land questions is the importance of history as a social science. The frequent use and misuse of historical arguments in discussions on such themes makes it especially appropriate to furnish correct arguments. The tendency to interpret the present by the aid of the past, though generally sound, may also be overdone. The use of common terms to cover realities from different epochs, often conceals the real differences. "Feudalism" is only one of the most striking examples of an historical terminology causing confusion through over-simplification. The dilemma facing the historian as a social scientist is between specialized knowledge and synthesis.

Strangely enough, History is supposed to embrace fairly vast areas of knowledge when dealing with long epochs in a remote past. The very same knowledge in a short space of modern time, on the contrary, belongs to a number of specialized disciplines—economics, political science, sociology etc., or even such of a purely technical character as agronomy or industrial technology. It sounds, sometimes, as if only the dizzy perspective of remote centuries could lead to an historical approach. Views of this kind underlie the low reliability characterizing much current historical information.

Synthesis, of course, is not a scientific method, but rather a way of handling scientific results. As recently stated, History — as, for instance, Geography — is not a distinct scientific discipline along with others, but rather "a branch of study, carried out according to scientific principles"^a. Critical analysis of sources is not the specific sign of the historian, it is only an application of the general critical principle inherent in all science.

When handling various methods of research belonging to our theme, we are therefore conscious of owing the reader the same

effort as the specialists of each branch would try to offer. An historical approach in this book does not mean adoption of a "synthetic" method of work that would diminish the reliability of the results. On the contrary, we aim at using historical arguments only when they are well founded. The rules of probability are everywhere the same, and a conclusion or a generalization that does not hold good on the basis of modern material does not do so any more on the basis of Mediaeval material.

On the other hand, experience in handling modern material and the pitfalls of probability it engenders, is likely to produce valuable contributions to the methodology of social history. It is our hope that the critical reflections on various modern sources made here will explain some of our scepticism towards much current information on social history in remote epochs.

(7) If it is generally true that most of the knowledge that belongs to the history of our time is brought forth by others than historians, then this is probably even more true about modern rural history. It is commonplace to say that agrarian history as such is neglected — the fact is too obvious to be denied, except by people almost entirely ignorant of the subject. It has been pointed out recently that a profound ignorance of agrarian matters has been at least partly responsible for some of the most spectacular political failures of our time^a. One of the great shortcomings of agrarian policy seems in fact to be that these matters have been treated mainly from different technical points of view. The approach of the historian is required, along with that of the technician, for the formation of both expert and public opinion.

WHY EUROPE?

(8) The choice of region for this enquiry may need a short explanation. Why Europe, why not only a somewhat homogeneous group of countries, and why limit our scope to our own continent? The question may seem superfluous to many readers, but not to answer it might cause some misunderstanding.

First of all: when making a "choice" out of a given material, there is always the risk of being arbitrary. Choosing a continent as traditionally defined does away with objections of this kind.

From this geographical scope, our main exclusion is European Turkey, as part of an essentially Asiatic state.

At the beginning of the period here considered, Europe had a kind of inner unity. An essentially common ideological framework and many resemblances in past social history formed the background for the pros and cons of public debate. Despite great differences, conditions seemed basically comparable from one country to another. Manifold contacts all over the continent created a consciousness of unity and common ways of expression. In many respects, the contrasts were smaller than they are now, and the idea of comparative surveys of Europe might perhaps have seemed more natural then from a static point of view.

How this unit came to fall apart is a story one side of which it is our intention to tell in this book. Other sides have to be told by those analyzing other parts of recent social and economic history. Wars and revolutions are mainly symptoms, even if sometimes bringing to fruition the development that generated them. One of the most fascinating problems is why the social and economic disparities in Europe should have become ever greater. This is the explanation for a comparative enquiry of our continent, while the presence of widely varying yet comparable social patterns as well as contrasting trends of development, make it a model subject for a comparative analysis, from which conclusions which are generally valid might emerge.

The possibility of reintegration of Europe — or some large part of it — in the future that is, of re-creating the lost unity, cannot be treated here. It is only our hope that this book may contribute to a better understanding of the agrarian problems involved in the integration issue.

A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

(9) Comparative research in agrarian social science is especially necessary in connection with definitions of concepts and for a better understanding of current trends of development.

Even basic concepts are often used in a way which implies a varying sense in the same word. Everybody talks about villages and dispersed settlement, large and small property, large and small farms, private versus collective property, only to mention

some important examples. When considering the opinions of various writers on "villages", for instance, one observes that many of them give a special sense to the term, influenced by conditions in the writer's own country. Intuitive views influenced by tacit assumptions within each one country are not only less comparable, but as a whole less reliable than concepts defined in the light of the experience of many countries. Even such a factor as the social role of property may remain partly unexplored as long as it is treated within the framework of one legal system only. From a fundamentally positivistic viewpoint of legal phenomena, which is necessary for a social scientist, legal terms like property could not possibly have any other sense than that derived from a close description of their real function in each society.

Since the countries of Europe today, as well as half a century ago, represent different stages of socio-economic development, a comparison between them and their trends of development is likely to furnish precious information as to the probable sequence of evolution in certain respects. If such factors as overpopulation, extensive monoculture, latifundia and microfundia, only to mention some of the most notorious elements of Mediterranean misery, are to be attacked with some success, it is of course of interest to see what became of similar conditions in countries with a different recent development. Especially when exploring the critical margins, the proportions that distinguish a sound society from a suffering one, comparative research may have something useful to say.

AGRARIAN STRUCTURE — NATURAL AND POLITICAL

(10) "Agrarian structure" is a somewhat vague but generally used term for the whole institutional framework within which agriculture does its work. All the complex structural questions in Europe cannot be dealt with in one book. We will here focus interest on a number of main topics with direct bearings on the land-labor relationships.

Agricultural settlement will thus be treated here from the viewpoint of the allocation of manpower in relation to the land.

At the same time, current policies and discussion will be viewed, as ascribing a specific social value to one or the other settlement form. Layout and fragmentation of land will be treated as a question of allocation of land in relation to manpower, and the consolidation and country-planning issues as attempts at solving problems which are both economic and political. Resources in land and manpower will be discussed, both in order to determine the trend of development in the direct quantitative relations between land and labor and, by weighting the productive resources, to map out the real importance of land hunger. On the same lines, the size of holdings will be compared and weighted, so that farm structure problems may be judged on a solid quantitative basis. Systems of land tenure will be scrutinized, in order to settle how far the differences in legal structure have real socio-economic bearings. It is also necessary to understand agricultural co-operation, as limiting and modifying the ownership-tenancy situation and as bringing about important modifications in the system of decision-making.

(11) The research items mentioned would not, however, alone fulfill the goal of our analysis. Every structure in a somewhat developed society is more or less the result of a compromise between artificial and spontaneous tendencies in social life. We call the latter "natural", the former "political" factors. We are conscious that the real difference between these sets of factors is more one of degree than of kind. Also "spontaneous", "popular" reactions, insofar as they result from superstition or class antagonism, for instance, may be inadequate and may be regarded as a sort of policy at a smaller scale and at a lower level. And of course the inner compulsion of economic and social circumstances may leave no alternative to the policy which is actually pursued. However, the contrast between "spontaneous" and "artificial" factors is distinguishable more or less throughout social life, though the borderline may not always be clear. Summing up the main trends in land policy and their consequences will contribute towards showing some of the inherent necessities of each situation.

As already hinted, a policy is not merely a systematic action for realizing a scheme that was thought useful or rational. Any coherent action is inspired by a system of thought which, more

often than not, is founded on some sort of ideological conception of human life. The critical point is not that the politician is driven by his wishes. No one amongst us can even drive a nail in the wall without being driven by some sort of a wish. But the difference between the technical experts and the ideological politicians does not lie here. The former may disagree as to the ways to reach the same goal, because their knowledge is different and they estimate unknown factors differently. The ideological politicians, on the contrary, work towards different goals, inspired by different attitudes towards irrational values. The underlying basis of a policy can only in a very imperfect way be concluded from overt actions. Therefore, the last chapter of this book analyses some of the most important ideological conceptions underlying recent land policies in Europe. This study will illustrate also the possibilities of modern quantitative semantics in conjunction with social research on the same subject matter as the propaganda analysed.

CHAPTER 1

AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT THE ALLOCATION OF LABOR

(12) The importance of the form of rural settlement for social life in the agricultural community is often stressed, both in theoretical research and in practical planning. Discussion on the topic is however often unclear, because different issues are kept together and the difference in their bearing on the subject is overlooked.

The basic contrast which it has been attempted to characterize and to explain is that between concentration and dispersion. These terms may be taken either in an absolute or in a relative sense. Absolute concentration means the size (in population numbers) of nucleated villages or other centers. Relative concentration should be an expression of the degree to which a rural population is allocated as between such centers, and in settlement of a decentralized character, respectively. Obviously, these two concepts do not relate to the same sort of problem. The bearing which relative concentration could have upon both land-labor relationships and other sides of rural social life is closely connected with the density of population. A loose cluster of houses, with rather long distances between them, may be regarded as a sort of village if surrounded by vast unsettled areas. The same or even smaller distances between the houses in vast stretches of very densely settled open countryside does not evoke the idea of a village either for the residents or for outside observers^a.

Questions of relative concentration are of importance mainly for human geography, especially in connection with the sociology of cohabitation. Size and scope of rural communities, the way in which a nucleated village is related to its surroundings, and

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