

On Neo-Populism and Marxism: A  
Comment on Uisa Patnaik

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Uisa Patnaik's article 'Neo-Populism and Marxism: The Chayanovian View of the Agrarian Question and Its Fundamental Fallacy,' (*This Journal*, vol. 6, July 1979), contains some strictures of my old essay 'Economic Theory and Agrarian Economics' (*Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 12, February 1960)—erroneously rendered by that author as 'Economic Theory and Agrarian Reforms'. Those strictures would normally call for a rebuttal on my part. However, I do not believe that I could state my views in a better way than I did twenty years ago. Nor do I think that I should repeat my argument again anywhere: that paper has been translated into French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and reprinted in several collections. The reader will have to judge on the basis of my original exposition.

However, in order to put the reader in a better position to judge, I should like to offer some information that seems to be vital *ex post*.

First, the reader should refer to the full version of my article, not to any summary reprinted in a collection. Among the sources where the full version is available are my own volumes: *Analytical Economics: Issues and Problems* (Harvard University Press, 1966) and *Energy and Economic Myths: Institutional and Analytical Economic Essays* (Pergamon Press, 1976). The last source is particularly advisable because it is followed by two postscripts occasioned by some reprinting requests, one in 1966, the other in 1975.

The 1975 deals with the terminological pitfall created by the multiple denotation of the term 'peasant'. An agrarian reform may benefit a society of peasants as found in Africa, Asia, or Europe, but not the landless people as those of North Eastern Brazil. Though called *campesates*, the latter are not peasants.

The 1966 Postscript brings in two important pieces of information. The first pertains to an article by the Soviet agricultural economist G. Shmelev published in the *Journal of the SSSR Academy* (April 1965). In that article, Shmelev shows, with Soviet data, that the family farms—the 'auxiliary' farms in Communist terminology—are far more efficient in both quantity and quality than the socialised agricultural sector. The same postscript includes the quintessence of an article by the famous Polish agricultural economist, Jerzy Tepicht. Convinced of the validity of the thesis defended for some specific historical conditions by Agrarians—who are erroneously called 'Neo-Populists' by Uisa Patnaik—the Communist leaders in Poland decided to preserve the family farm system for as long as the economic situation would justify. Jerzy Tepicht, later, developed the argument fully in his highly praised volume, *Marxisme et agriculture. Le Paysan Polonais* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1973).

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The testimonies of Shmelev and Tepicht, coming, as they do, from the inner altar of Communism at work, should be long pondered over by the reader interested in deciding for himself on which side the balance of the truth inclines itself in this old controversy of *Die Agrar Frage*, as Karl Kautsky so fittingly called it.<sup>1</sup>

NOTE

1. A footnote of crucial relevance for the Agrarian thesis. Neither the Agrarians, nor Chayanov, nor any other 'non-Marxist programme' for that matter, has ever claimed that population growth does not constitute the irreducible ultimate obstacle. See, for instance, *Energy and Economic Myths*, pp. 99, 123 note 54. The recent Malthusian orientation of the government in the People's Republic of China ends the story.