

Articulation from Feudalism to Neoliberalism

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Introduction

Through a very roundabout way, I came to the conclusion that primitive accumulation has an ongoing importance for the global economy. I was beginning a dissertation on capitalists' application of technology in the context of dynamic game theory -- a new technique at the time that I was probably ill-equipped to pursue. My advisor, George Kuznets, supposedly Simon's smarter brother, just left my drafts unread.

Irritated, I became determined to write the easiest dissertation ever produced in our department. I went to the departmental library to find the shortest dissertation ever published. I determined to make my proposal the first chapter. I looked for a subject that I thought would be of relatively little consequence, so no advisers would be tempted to meddle. I found a data series on tractors in the United States. I became especially interested when I discovered that the person who had compiled the data had just retired and that nobody was going to take up his work. Unfortunately, Kuznets suddenly got interested in my work, but that is another story.

The dissertation had nothing to do with primitive accumulation, but my work sparked interest in the subject, even though I did not know what primitive accumulation was at the time. The American agricultural community used to regularly celebrate its success by compiling statistics that showed that one farmer feeds 10, 20, 30 U.S. citizens. This number grew steadily over the decades as the farm sector shrunk. I realized that this statistic was ridiculous because a new social division of labor was at work. Farm labor, which had once raised horses, for example, was now hard at work building tractors and other farm inputs. Similarly, another part of the agribusiness industry took over farmers' traditional work in distributing food.

At the same time, this number also reflected an element of primitive accumulation, since relatively self-sufficient, self-provisioning farmers were the first to fall by the wayside. At the same time, the tractor data led me to look at the fossil fuel consumption of the agricultural sector. I concluded that the agricultural sector was consuming more than 10 calories of fossil fuel for each calorie of food that it was delivering to the table.

A bit of further research revealed that the large, supposedly successful farms that were taking over the agricultural sector were not necessarily more efficient than small farmers; instead, they just seemed to be making more intensive use of purchased inputs, many of which depended upon cheap fossil fuels. When I showed this data to the professors in my department, they dismissed it, explaining that if fossil fuels became more expensive in the future, farmers could easily find substitute technologies that depended less on fossil fuels. When the first oil crisis hit, severely affecting much of the farm sector, these same professors denied having said what they did.

After I finished my first book on agriculture, I decided to pursue the nature of the social

division of labor in agriculture. Peasant movements at the time seemed to be a very dynamic force. I had begun teaching a class in the history of economic thought, a subject for which I was untrained, having taken only one undergraduate class.

Reading the history of economic thought, I began taking an interest in how classical political economists treated the social division of labor in agriculture. A sharp pattern began to emerge. Although the social division of labor was almost entirely absent from the theoretical works of classical political economy, the major theorists took a keen interest in the subject, although they largely confined to their ideas to their non-theoretical writings. These authors were consistent. The peasant system of self-provisioning had to be destroyed in order to create a labor force, but the destruction had to be gradual.

I was struck by the sophistication of some of these primitive accumulationists. They realized that to destroy the subsistence economy altogether would not be in their best interests for two reasons: first, and most obviously, the capitalist employers were not prepared to absorb the entire subsistence. Second, and more subtly, self-provisioning subsidized wage labor.

I was not aware at the time either of the literature on the articulation of modes production or of the works of Harold Wolpe, but these primitive accumulationists clearly described how such matters worked. Crudely, for the capitalist sector as a whole, surplus value represents the difference between variable capital and the total output. If, for example, the worker or the worker's family produces food or support from within a pre-capitalist mode of production, the quantity of necessary variable capital falls, leaving more surplus value. In effect, capitalism sucks value from the peasant sector.

Here, the question of labor time was crucial. Early capitalist technology was almost identical to the traditional methods of production. Since the early capitalists had nothing to contribute to the production system, they had only two ways to extract surplus value from the population in the countryside. They could either reduce the workers' standard of living or increase their labor time, what Marx called absolute surplus value. Neither option would seem particularly attractive to the potential working-class that had no particular need for wage labor.

For example, Samuel Johnson observed that a pair of traditional Scottish brogues could be made at home in one hour. On the market, shoes sold for one-half crown per pair (Johnson 1774, 50). According to Adam Smith's estimates of wage rates for labor in the vicinity of Edinburgh, where workers undoubtedly earned more than in the countryside, a citizen of that city would have to work for three full days to earn enough money to purchase a pair of shoes (Smith 1976, I.viii.31, 92). Commercially produced shoes would need to have a great deal of appeal to induce people to work for almost three days to purchase them, when people could make their own brogues in an hour, assuming that they could obtain leather cheaply. Such a transaction would make no more sense than for the Chinese peasant to come to work in a Nike sweatshop for a two dollars day wage in order to purchase a \$100 pair of Nikes.

Given the unfavorable exchange between wages and purchased commodities, people in the Highlands generally preferred self-provisioning to wage labor. Seeing this as a problem, Thomas Pennant, a botanist, approved of whatever restricted people's opportunity for self-provisioning. For example, he commended the practice of the Earl of Bute, whose "farms

were possessed of a set of men, who carried on at the same time the profession of farming and fishing to the manifest injury of both. His lordship drew a line between these incongruent employes, and obliged each to carry on the business he [Bute] preferred, distinct from the other" (Pennant 1774, 2, 160).

Pennant did not base his objection to these poor husbandmen on technical grounds. He admitted that "in justice to the old farmers, notice must be taken of their skill in ploughing even in their rudest days, for the ridges were strait, and the ground laid out in a manner that did them credit" (ibid.). Pennant wanted a new system of dependency. Thus, he praised the management of the Breadalbane estate, where tenants could stay rent-free "on the condition that they exercise some trade. [Consequently, Breadalbane] has got some as good workmen, in common trades, as any in his Majesty's kingdom" (Pennant 1772, 90). To establish such dependency, Pennant saw the need to restrict the possibility of hunting for one's own food.

Calibrating the Model of Primitive Accumulation

Classical political economy quickly recognized that once people could no longer produce all their own food, they would become at least partially dependent on the market for their nourishment. But absolute dependence was not desirable. Writers at the time paid considerable attention to the effect of varying the extent of dependence, or what we might term, "relative primitive accumulation." They wanted to make sure that workers would be able to be self-sufficient enough to raise the rate of surplus value without making them so independent that they would or could resist wage labor. Such calculations about the appropriate extent of household production were exceedingly common in the eighteenth century as this proposal in an 1800 issue of the Commercial and Agricultural Magazine:

a quarter acre of garden-ground will go a great way toward rendering the peasant independent of any assistance. However, in this beneficent intention moderation must be observed, or we may chance to transform the labourer into a petty farmer; from the most beneficial to the most useless of industry. When a labourer becomes possessed of more land than he and his family can cultivate in the evenings ... the farmer can no longer depend on him for constant work, and the hay-making and harvest ... must suffer to a degree which ... would sometimes prove a national inconvenience. [cited in E. Thompson 1963, 219-20]

Robert Gourlay (1822, 145-46), an associate of Arthur Young, made a similar point:

the half acre of land is condescended upon as being such a quantity as any poor man could make the most of at his spare hours, and from which he could raise sufficient food for a cow, along with his liberty of pasturage on the common; but there are reasons which would make it politic and right to diminish both the extent of the common and the garden plot. A quarter of an acre is the proper size for a garden, and 25 instead of 50 acres of common would be quite sufficient. A rood of land, under good garden culture, will yield a great abundance of every kind of vegetable for a family, besides a little for a cow and pig It is not the intention to make labourers professional gardeners or farmers! It is intended to confine them to bare convenience. The bad effects of giving too much land to labourers was discovered more than thirty years ago, in the lowlands of Scotland [The] bad effects of the little potatoe farms in Ireland are well known; and

nothing but dirt and misery is witnessed among the Crofters of the Highlands of Scotland. A tidy garden, with the right of turning out a cow in a small, well-improved and very well fenced field, would produce efforts of a very different kind indeed.

The Earl of Winchilsea, G. Finch (1796, 5-6), offered another example of the calculus of primitive accumulation. In a letter to Sir John Sinclair, president of the British Board of Trade, he wrote:

[N]othing is so beneficial both to them [the laborers] and to the Land Owners, as having Land to be occupied either for the keeping of Cows, or as gardens, according to circumstances By means of these advantages, the Labourers and their families live better, and are consequently more fit to endure labour; it makes them more contented, and more attached to their situation, and it gives them a sort of independence which makes them set a higher value upon their character [W]hen a Labourer has obtained a Cow, and Land sufficient to maintain her, the first thing he has thought of, has been, how he could save money enough to buy another.

The earl estimated that four-fifths of the labor put into a garden will come "at extra hours, and when they and their children would otherwise be unemployed" (ibid., 14). As might be expected, he cautioned against allowing a laborer access to even several acres of arable land because that much land "would occupy so much of his time, that the Take would, upon the whole, be injurious to him" (ibid., 13).

Calibration must necessarily adjust with changing technology. For example, progress in spinning, traditionally an agricultural sideline, failed to increase the capacity to weave cloth (see Smelser 1959, 65). Accordingly, the textile industry needed to move more people from part-time farming into full-time spinning.

In this spirit, the British Board of Agriculture attempted to assist those who employed farm labor to benefit from a more self-sufficient labor force. It offered a gold medal "to each of the five persons, who shall, in the most satisfactory manner, prove, by experiment, the practicability of cottagers being enabled to keep one or two milch cows on the produce of the land cultivated with spade and hoe only" (cited in Sinclair 1803, 850).

To be sure, the board did not intend to return to precapitalist subsistence farming. Its president, Sir John Sinclair (ibid., 851), wanted the small farming operated under three principles:

1. That a cottager shall raise, by his own labour, some of the most material articles of subsistence for himself and his family;
2. That he shall be enabled to supply the adjoining markets with the smaller agricultural productions; and
3. That both he and his family shall have it in their power to assist the neighboring farmers, at all seasons, almost equally as well as if they had no land in their occupation.

Sinclair had two objects in mind, both of which pertained to primitive accumulation. First, he thought that the provision of a small plot of land would make peasants accept enclosures more readily. Second, a glance at Sinclair's three points indicates that he thought that if small-scale

farms could be properly proportioned, agricultural employers could profit from a cheaper labor force. Sinclair, following the logic of articulation, calculated that the cottagers would earn slightly more than half their income from wages. The rest was expected to come from their sales of agricultural produce. Moreover, in excess of one-third of their money wages was expected to return to the landed gentry in the form of rents paid for their tiny plots of land (ibid., 854).

Sinclair, like the rest of the classical primitive accumulationists agreed that capital had to exert great care lest the worker become "a little gardener instead of a labourer" (cited in Chambers and Mingay 1966, 134).

Many later primitive accumulationists adhered to Sinclair's vision. By the nineteenth century, the bulk of the very small farmers already were wage earners who supplemented their earnings with agricultural pursuits (see Wordie 1974; Wells 1979). This arrangement formed the basis for the early takeoff in East Asian development. In South Africa, Wolpe discovered the evidence given by the Chamber of Mines

It is clearly to the advantage of the mines that native labourers should be encouraged to return to their homes after the completion of the ordinary period of service. The maintenance of the system under which the mines are able to obtain unskilled labour at a rate less than ordinarily paid in industry depends upon this, for otherwise the subsidiary means of subsistence would disappear and the labourer would tend to become a permanent resident upon the Witwatersrand, with increased requirements. [Wolpe 1972, p. 434]

Game Laws

In my research, I found the Game Laws, which restricted hunting, one of the most interesting aspects of my investigation of primitive accumulation. Many of you are no doubt familiar with the restriction of hunting in Africa. In Great Britain, the Game Laws represented a strange convergence of capitalism and feudalism.

Although the British Game Laws began as a feudal institution, they lost most of their importance as feudalism waned. By the end of the sixteenth century, the English state had even ceased to enforce them, although they still remained on the books. Charles I tried to revive them in 1630 to raise revenue, but both Parliament and Civil War conditions prevented him from doing so (Munsche 1980, 189).

The revival of the Game Laws began in 1671. The preamble sounds far more like the handiwork of avaricious capitalists intent on maximizing surplus value than an appeal to feudal tradition:

Whereas great mischief do ensue by inferior tradesmen, apprentices, and other dissolute persons neglecting their trades and employments who follow hunting, fishing and other game to the ruin of themselves and their neighbors, therefore, if any such person shall presume to hunt, hawk, fish or fowl (unless in company of the master of such apprentice duly qualified) he shall ... be subject to the other penalties. [William and Mary 3 and 4, Chapter 23, reprinted in Chitty 1812, 1: 459-65; also cited in Ignatieff 1978, 26]

Even so, the initial spirit of this Game Law may have been as feudal as its predecessors. According to one of the few works devoted to the study of this subject, "The Game Laws were

born out of a desire to enhance the status of country gentlemen in the bitter aftermath of the Civil War. Their message was that land was superior to money" (Munsche 1980, 164).

While an anti-bourgeois sentiment may have motivated the Game Laws, these acts also represented a direct response to the refusal of the rural poor to accept the landlords' assertion of unprecedented property rights, which came at the expense of the traditional rights of the poor in the countryside (see Ignatieff 1978, 16).

These traditional rights were far from inconsequential. For the rural poor, hunting was an important source of nutrition rather than just a pleasant recreation. The Game Laws, in this sense, became part of the larger movement to cut off large masses of the rural people from their traditional means of production (E. P. Thompson 1975, 94, 99, 207, 261).

Once English leaders recognized the unexpected benefits of the Game Laws, the people in power went well beyond merely embracing the acts as they found them; they passed increasingly restrictive measures with even more inhumane penalties. The British Game Laws became the harshest in the world (see Engels 1845, 552-53).

Although the spirit of the Game Laws may have been in tune with modern capitalism, the British system of justice often administered them in a decidedly feudal style. The case of the unfortunate Richard Dellers became a particularly famous example. On the basis of information from his game keeper and a servant, the Duke of Buckingham convicted Dellers. The duke, presiding over the trial in his own drawing room, informed Dellers that if he uttered a single impertinent word, he would be taken to jail or the stocks (Munsche 1980, 76; see also Cobbett 1830, 1: 191-93). Henry Brougham, speaking in 1828 when the Dellers affair was still fresh in the minds of the British public, roared: "There is not a worse constituted tribunal on the face of the earth" (cited in Munsche 1980, 76).

Nonetheless, despite the feudal execution and intent of the modern Game Laws, their effect was decidedly capitalistic insofar as they succeeded in accelerating the process of primitive accumulation.

The Oppressive Nature of the Bourgeois Game Laws

Although the feudal administration of the Game Laws was harsh, society still expected the gentry to respect their paternalistic obligations that could temper the severity. Generally, those most in need would expect some modest generosity from the superior orders; however, the social mores were changing.

With the decline of feudal relations, land ownership was becoming more of a business and less a way of life. The economic value of land rose and the gentry became more bourgeoisified (Wood 1999). Landlords' relations with their tenants became both more distant and more exploitative. Long-term leases became less common. Rental income was on the rise. Cottagers were being eliminated. Casual labor was replacing full-time workers and servants. Any good-will was fast disappearing from the countryside.

Within this context, the Game Laws became ever more brutal. The Waltham Black Acts of 1722 were among the earliest of the severe measures to punish poachers. This legislation was devised at a time when venison had become a prized delicacy, perhaps because of the great expanse required for raising a deer (see E. P. Thompson 1975, 30). More and more, poachers began to see the quarry as a commodity rather than as an object of direct consumption. A century later in 1826, a journalist lamented that it was "difficult to make an

uneducated man appreciate the sanctity of private property in game [when] ... the produce of a single night's poach was often more than the wages for several weeks' work" (cited in Shaw 1966, 156).

The penalties for taking small game initially were less severe than for poaching deer until landowners began to take measures to increase the population of deer on their land. In response, the scope of the Game Laws expanded rapidly. During the first six decades of the eighteenth century only six acts were directed against poachers of small game. The next fifty-six years saw the enactment of thirty-three such laws. As a result, "Meat virtually disappeared from the tables of the rural poor" (Deane and Coale 1967, 41).

Poaching was taken so seriously that it was, on occasion, even equated with treason. The British courts enforced these laws with shocking ferocity. Several poachers were actually executed (E. P. Thompson 1975, 68).

The imposition of draconian penalties for infractions of the supposedly feudal Game Laws at such a late date might seem anomalous for an advancing capitalist economy. Yet, the Game Laws were an important part of the intensifying of class struggle that was engulfing the countryside during the age of classical political economy. One pamphleteer exclaimed that "the article of game [is] productive of more disquiet, popular discontent and local animosity than any other law ever established in this kingdom" (Taplin 1792, 168).

The conviction rates indicate the sharpening of this conflict. Between 1820 and 1827, nearly a quarter of those committed to prison were convicted of poaching (Shaw 1966, 155). In Wiltshire alone, more than 1,300 persons were imprisoned under the Game Laws in the fifteen years after the battle at Waterloo in 1815, more than twice the number for the previous fifty years (Munsche 1980, 138). These numbers undoubtedly understate the conviction rates since the Justices of the Peace who heard cases frequently neglected to record convictions (Hay 1975, 192).

Despite the reform of the Game Laws in 1831, the number of convictions for poaching still continued their dramatic increase (Munsche 1980, 157). During the 1840s, in some rural counties, 30 to 40 percent of all male convictions were still for infractions of the Game Laws (Horn 1981, 179-80). The Duke of Richmond told the House of Lords on 19 September 1831 that one-seventh of all criminal convictions in England was for violations of the Game Acts (Hammond and Hammond 1927, 167). In addition, the state convicted a good number for poachers of other crimes that grew out of their poaching, such as resisting arrest.

The majority of convicts that Britain exiled to Australia supposedly were convicted of poaching. Robert Hughes (1987, 170), who disputes that view, claiming that the majority of transported convicts were guilty of more serious crimes, still shows how the Game Laws were used to rid the labor market of people whom the authorities deemed to be undesirable.

Economic conditions, rather than feudal history, explain the upswing in conviction rates. For example, the Hammonds (1927, 167) asserted that poaching became more intensive when unemployment was high. After the Napoleonic Wars ended in 1812, some 250,000-400,000 men were demobilized. During the war, threshing machines had also taken many of their traditional jobs in the countryside (see Munsche 1980, 136). Just as the people's means of providing for themselves was diminishing, along with the opportunity for jobs, the cost of purchasing food on the market was rising substantially, catching the workers in a cruel

scissors (Hammond and Hammond 1927, 86 ff). Hence, many unemployed workers poached because they had no other option for survival.

The Game Laws and Bourgeois Hegemony

Many observers recognized that people would resist drudgery so long as they could hunt instead. As an early writer from the United States warned his readers, "once hunters, farewell to the plough" (de Crèvecoeur 1782, 51). Similarly, John Bellers, famed Quaker philanthropist of the early 18th century, remarked: "Our Forests and great Commons (make the Poor that are upon them too much like the Indians) being a hindrance to Industry, and are Nurseries of Idleness and Insolence" (Bellers 1714, 128; see also E. P. Thompson 1991, 165).

The legal theorist, William Blackstone (1775; 4: 174-75), agreed, observing: "the only rational footing, upon which we can consider it a crime [to violate the Game Laws], is, that in low and indigent persons it promotes idleness and takes them away from their proper employments and callings." William Pitt concurred (cited in Cobbett 1806-20; 32: 851).

When Parliament debated the Game Laws in 1830, not one prominent spokesperson for political economy called for their abolition. Instead, Robert Peel, whose family wealth had come from the employment of those who were leaving the land, cautioned Parliament not to act with undue haste: "we are apt to be too sanguine in our anticipations of advantages to be derived from a particular change. He was afraid that we overlooked the love of enterprise and amusement, which rendered the pursuit of game attractive to the common people" (cited in Hansard, 597-98).

The Game Laws also prohibited the rural poor from keeping weapons (see Anon. 1757a), thereby diminishing people's ability to resist the onslaught on their means of subsistence. Blackstone (1775: ii, 412) noted, "the prevention of popular insurrection and resistance to the government, by disarming the bulk of the people; which last is a reason oftener meant, than avowed, by makers of forest or Game Laws." Later research has confirmed Blackstone's contention, finding that access to weapons was a major factor in determining the level of exploitation (see Pettengill 1981).

Horace Walpole, after noting the speed with which the French Game Laws were eliminated, confided to Lady Ossory: "I never admired game-acts, but I do not wish to see guns in the hands of all the world, for there are other *ferae naturae* besides hares and partridges -- and when all Europe is admiring and citing our constitution, I am for preserving it where it is" (Walpole 1937-1974; cited in Munsche 1980, 126).

One of the earliest acts of the French Revolution was repeal of this hated legislation. At the time, Arthur Young (1794, 9; see also 441-42) exclaimed, "One would think that every rusty gun in Provence is at work."

Yes, the Game Laws reflected an emerging hegemony of property relations in which the interests of capital and the gentry coincided. The gentry could enjoy the prestige of hunting, while the capitalists could profit from the labor from people who were forbidden to hunt as a means of subsistence.

The lesson of the Game Laws was not lost on either the gentry or the bourgeoisie. Since the taking of game was tantamount to challenging property rights, such acts had to be punished severely. After all, the Game Laws represented an essential bulwark for the social order.

Lord Milton made a similar point to Lord Kenyon in 1791, drawing upon the experience of the French Revolution: "The Republican party has made the Game Laws the object of their abuse and detestation; in France, the instant they began to overturn the constitution and level all distinctions, these were the first they pulled down. It therefore seems to me that they should be most respectfully guarded" (ibid., 127).

The Game Laws also seem to have stiffened the resolve of many of the common people as well. William Cobbett wrote in the Political Register of 29 March 1823 that a gentleman in Surrey asked a young man who he could live on a half crown per week. "I don't live upon it," said he. "How do you live then?" "Why," he replied, "I poach; it is better to be hanged than to be starved to death" (cited in Hammond and Hammond 1927, 167).

The Destructive Nature of the Game Laws

The maintenance of the Game Laws imposed severe economic costs, over and above the direct consequences for the poor. Animals protected by the laws ravaged the nation's crops. Others, which were zealously hunted, such as the little foxes and martens, were valuable predators that prevented the population of rodents from becoming excessive (Kautsky 1899, 393). Even worse, hunters and their horses trampled much of what the game left growing in the fields. A letter to the editor of the London Magazine in 1757b claimed:

The present scarcity is owing to an evil, felt by the industrious husbandman, who has in many places in this kingdom, seen all his care, labour, and industry sacrificed to the caprice and humors of those who have set their affections so much on game. Numberless are the places and parishes of the kingdom which have had at least one third part of their wheat crop devoured and eat[en] up by hares. [Anon 1757b, 87]

A modern student of the Game Laws observed, "Pheasants, if anything, were more destructive" (Munsche 1980, 46).

The destruction of crop by game was a very important phenomenon. In France, for example, on the eve of the revolution, people were given the chance to register their concerns to the government. In almost every case, the people of the countryside demonstrated their exasperation at the devastation caused by game and hunters (see Philipponneau 1956, 29; Young 1794, 9).

The grievances of the English peasants were no doubt just as strong as those of the French. One notorious fox hunt carried its riders twenty-eight miles through the British countryside (W. Thomas 1936, 43). A recent study pointed out other costs besides the trampled grain:

Sportsmen, it was said, continually broke fences, beat down unharvested corn, trampled turnips, disturbed sheep "big with lamb" and generally pursued game with little concern for the damage they caused. The quantity and volume of these complaints suggest that such conduct was common and deeply resented. [Munsche 1980, 45; see also Anon. 1757a, 14]

The upper classes were outraged that the poor farmers did not welcome the destruction of their crops by hunters. Anthony Trollope (1929, 56-58) reflected this attitude in the Pall Mall Gazette in 1865:

[I]n England two or three hundred men claim the right of access to every man's

land during the whole period of the winter months! ... Now and then, in every hunt, some man comes up, who is indeed, more frequently a small proprietor new to the glories of ownership, than a tenant farmer who determines to vindicate his rights and oppose the field. He puts up a wire-fence round his domain ... and defies the world around him. It is wonderful how great is the annoyance which one such man may give, and how thoroughly he may destroy the comfort of the coverts in his neighborhood."

Trollope (*ibid.*, 59-60) went on to explain:

Farmers as a rule do not think very much of their wheat. When such riding is practicable, of course they like to see men take the headlands and furrows; but their hearts are not broken by the tracks of horses across their wheat fields. I doubt, indeed, whether wheat is ever much injured by such usage.

Perhaps the owners of some large farms were not aggravated by the loss of their grains. For the larger the farm, smaller would be the share of the total crop lost to a swath of destruction caused by a group of horses.

Of course, Trollope wrote long after the controversies about the Game Laws had subsided, but he reflected a mentality that had been common in earlier years. One anonymous writer despaired of any communication with people who were of this persuasion:

It is in vain to argue with a man who will maintain, that the wealth of his country, and the advancement of cultivation, is of no concern, when compared to the pleasure of fox-hunting; or, that the farmers and tenants, instead of following the plough, are much better employed when after the hounds, and while neglecting the culture of their own grounds, laying waste and ravaging the improvements of their industrious neighbours. [Anon. 1772, 33]

In the 1840s, game destroyed an estimated quarter of the crops of Buckinghamshire (Horn 1981, 179). Parliament indicated an interest in this problem on only one occasion: "for most sportsmen, the season began with partridge shooting on the first of September ..., but following the bad harvest in 1795 ..., [e]arly in 1796, Parliament voted to postpone the start of partridge shooting until the fourteenth of September" (Munsche 1980, 46).

Parliament repealed this provision by the next year.

The Game Laws also throw a critical light on the role of the gentry. On the infrequent occasions when Parliament took notice of the Game Laws during the late eighteenth century, the ruling strata adopted a curious defense of this legislation. Although hunting was deemed to be an improper diversion for the poor, members of Parliament commended hunting for the rich since it was regarded as an encouragement to agricultural production. But how could running horses and hounds through the fields, trampling grain and destroying fences, possibly improve agricultural production?

Keep in mind that the gentry were an idle lot, spending much of their time enjoying the pleasures of the city. In 1826 a leading journalist observed: "the most useful and valuable class," was "entitled to properly regulated ... amusement and relaxation after the performance of their public duties." Moreover, the periodic visits to the countryside supposedly contributed to the "virtue and civilization of the English peasant," which saved Britain from the horrors of the French Revolution (cited in Shaw 1966, 156).

More commonly, people recognized that the opportunity to hunt seemed to be the only means of bringing the wealthy into contact with their land (see Cobbett 1806-1820; 32: 833 ff; Horn 1981, 172). To my knowledge, none of the gentry rose to defend themselves against this characterization of their relationship to the land.

Political Economy and The Game Laws

The most intense application of the Game Laws falls between 1776, the same year that when the Wealth of Nations was published, and the 1840s, an interval often used to mark the age of classical political economy. Political economists of the time took a lively concern in all matters pertaining to the functioning of the economy. The consequent loss of grain continued without comment from the ranks of political economists, whose keen vision rarely left any opportunity for increased productivity pass unnoticed.

For example, political economy devoted an enormous amount of energy to protesting the consequences of the Corn Laws, while all but completely ignoring the Game Laws. Why should classical political economy have taken note of so much of the minutiae of society, while remaining oblivious to the monstrous impact of the Game Laws? Here was a set of laws that created substantial hardships for an enormous number of people. They allowed many workers to be incarcerated or transported. They condoned the destruction of valuable crops.

The classical political economists had to know about the human costs. Even if they were entirely ignorant of the realities of rural life, they had to know transportation was a common punishment inflicted on poachers in the early nineteenth century. But Frank Fetter (1980, 192), after carefully noting the attendance and voting patterns of political economists in Parliament, observed, "transportation was not an issue in which many political economists were concerned."

How could the classical political economists never have broached the subjects of trampled of the grain or the crops lost to the protected wildlife? Surely, the damage done to the harvest must have been of the same order of significance as the distortions caused by the Corn Laws. Yet Corn Laws were of great concern and the Game Laws were nowhere to be found.

The Game Laws defined new forms of property. Classical Political Economy justified the market as a source of efficiency. Yet, these arbiters of efficiency remained silent.

This omission in no way absolves these economists of any responsibility for the repression and destruction associated with the operation of the Game Laws. Silence in the face of such conditions amounted to an effective form of support.

Conclusion

Primitive accumulation may have historical relevance, but what about the ongoing importance of primitive accumulation? Primitive accumulation seems to have three different dimensions: first, primitive accumulation involves expropriation of people's means of providing for themselves; secondly, purposefully forcing people into wage labor; and finally, intentionally manipulating the social division of labor. In all likelihood, we will not see all these conditions met very often in the contemporary economy, with one ominous exception.

Sadly, expropriation is still almost commonplace. In the United States, local governments are using the right of eminent domain to take over peoples' homes to give land to private corporations. On the most obvious level, multinational corporations are taking over

resources in a manner that would have made earlier primitive accumulationists proud. Their primary objective, however, is not to deprive people of their means of production, but rather to grab wealth directly.

Privatization does have much in common with classical primitive accumulation. We might think of public services as a form of social self-provisioning. A social dimension was undoubtedly present during classical primitive accumulation. In the case of the privatization of necessities, the imposition of markets forces families to make themselves useful to capital or to put themselves at severe risk. People deprived of clean water die as tragically as a peasants shot by the game wardens of old.

Like imperialism, privatization expands the field of business. When the government rather than the public is the client, the opportunity for special favors is almost unlimited.

In United States, for example, privatization is expanding in the schools, prisons, and even the military. This privatization may only be the beginning. The forces behind the administration of George W. Bush are promoting something they call "the ownership society."

This benign-sounding expression is a cover for a plan to demolish every existing social support. The idea is that leaving everybody to fend for themselves puts them at the mercy of the job market in a manner reminiscent of the dispossessed peasants. Like the classical primitive accumulationists, their modern disciples are clear about the outcome. They gloat that in the ownership society people will work have to harder and save more.

Unlike the early primitive accumulationists, their modern counterparts are rabid ideologists. They have no patience with moderation or even the sophisticated calibration that occupied people like Sinclair. Yet the modern primitive accumulationists put on a benevolent face, pretending that privatization will serve the interests of ordinary people. Only business is capable of providing efficiency and modern technology.

When economic historians look back at the history of primitive accumulation, what they see is part of the larger process of the Industrial Revolution, which represented an enormous material advance. I don't think that Marx entirely disagreed, though he was mindful about the destructive nature of primitive accumulation.

While early capitalism was brutal, it still furthered society's potential for creating a better life. This new variant of primitive accumulation really offers nothing more than a callous redistribution of wealth and income, without any promise of compensating technological advances.

Let me close with a final nod to Marx. One of the great lessons of Capital is to show how under capitalism responsibility becomes diffused. Unlike primitive accumulation, where a vicious feudal lord may bear individual responsibility, the capitalist is, in Marx's wonderful expression, merely the character mask of capital.

The capitalist has little choice but to compete aggressively or cease functioning as a capitalist. The results can be equally brutal, but the fault lies with the system, not the individual. In order to minimize the danger of analyzing the world in terms of justice or unfairness, Marx left the discussion of primitive accumulation for the final section of Volume 1.

But putting aside the apparent unfairness of individual capitalists, gives the appearance that the system is somehow fair and objective, especially within the context of classical

political economy. Marx, however, insisted that political economy pierce the misleading facade of objectivity in recognizing the exploitation of wage labor, and even more so how capitalism puts limits on the ability of people to fulfill their potential.

Like the capitalist system, privatization calls for clear political analysis. Movements in South Africa, Bolivia, and elsewhere have made great strides in that respect. Even so, much remains to be done. Hopefully, our gathering might be useful in this endeavor.

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