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NOTE ON METHODOLOGY WITH RESPECT TO THE ANALYSIS OF
THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TOWN AND COUNTRY.

BY

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Notes on Methodology with respect to the analysis of
the relations between town and country

According to the conventional theory, the relations between town and country are analyzed, if not exclusively, at least mainly from the point of view of the technical division of labour (what are the commodity supplied by the town and the rural area respectively?). But, these relations must be analysed from quite a different angle, that of the modes of production located in the town and in the rural area, and inter-connected within the same social formation. Usually the geographical distribution of interrelated modes of production between the different regions or between town and country is a specific feature of a social formation. It is only later that the study of the various aspects of the technical division of labour must be tackled, in relation to the answer to our question and not vice versa.

Let us therefore briefly examine the methodological implications of this reversal of the hierarchy established between the technical and the social division of labour in the most characteristic historical situations.

1. Central Capitalism:^{1/}

To the extent that this is an advanced central capitalist social formation, the same mode of production, namely the capitalist mode, governs all the patterns of activity both in the countryside and in the town. At the limit, the social formation is reduced to the capitalist mode.

The result is that, there is no clear difference between the town and the rural area or rather the rural area as such disappears.

^{1/} Advanced capitalist countries (Europe, United States and Canada, Japan).

Specifically, the village disappears, the rural area becomes empty. The rural area like the factory becomes only a place of work: a place of work characterized by a lower density of workers, nothing worse.

Under these conditions, the relation between town and country can indeed be studied from the point of view of the conditions created by the technical division of labour. The problem becomes essentially that of transport costs affecting the exchange of commodities between branches of activity which all have the same theoretical status, branches of activity governed by the capitalist mode. This is perhaps the origin of the blunder of the conventional theory which highlights this angle in the analysis of the urban-rural relations and transposes it through history.

The urban rural relations lose their relative importance to the benefit of the relations between towns: the problem of hierarchy among the latter becomes a major problem, and this problem again seems largely capable of being studied from the angle of the technical division of labour.

2 - The Transition from Feudalism to Central Capitalism^{1/}

During this long transition (prolonged in some countries until the end of the 19th century or even later), there is a problem of town-country relations connected with the problematics of the inter-connection between the different modes of production.

In fact, the capitalist mode of production first emerges and develops in the urban centres (proleterian concentration) while the feudal mode of production survives in the countryside, although it

^{1/} Europe from the 14th to the 19th century.

is henceforth dominated by the urban capitalist mode. This domination and the transformation of the feudal mode involve both the persistence of ground rent and its transformation from feudal rent into capitalist rent.

It is in relation to this transition that the problem of the hierarchy of the towns which are formed within this concrete historical framework and which is transmitted to the later phase of advanced central capitalism must be studied.

3. - Precapitalist societies^{1/}

Here, the social formation is almost always very complex, and encompasses several modes of production varying in type from one province to the other, from one region to the other etc. The result is that, it is difficult to determine the geographical boundaries of the social formation, especially as long-distance trade may bring into contact social formations which do not know each other.

Here certain modes of production may be concentrated in the towns (for instance, the simple commodity mode of production or slave-based manufacture etc...) while these modes of production are not represented in the rural area. Under these conditions, the town-country connection is merely the geographical aspect of the connection between the different modes of production of the formation.

In these formations however, the main aspect of the town when it exists, is usually that it is the place for the centralization and spending of the surplus extracted from the rural area, and/or of the profits made from the interconnection of autonomous formations (long-distance trade).

^{1/} And pre-colonial, of course.

The accurate analysis of the relative weight of this main aspect and that of the other aspect mentioned above (concentration of certain modes of production and of the profits of long-distance trade in the town) determines the particular configuration of towns and of the town-country and town-town relations in each of the pre-capitalist societies.

In connection with these problems, the problem of surplus generation must be clearly distinguished from that of its circulation, including its consumption and the generation of secondary incomes from this consumption. We have here to consider in depth the idea of productive labour, that is, productive of a surplus in a given mode of production and not "productive in general" (of what?). The Physiocrats were aware of the importance of this problem, although their assumption that the surplus is only generated in the countryside does not correspond to the period they studied (the end of the 18th century), but to a previous period (the Middle Ages). To be more specific, the surplus in the European feudal formations was mainly (if not exclusively) generated in the rural area, but it was also accessorially generated in the towns where there were forms of labour exploitation, that is, modes of production which went beyond the simple commodity mode of production. But if there are in the formation only the feudal and the simple commodity modes, the surplus can only come from the feudal mode. In other pre-capitalist formations (the Arab world, for instance), the circulation between formations of the surplus tapped by long-distance trade plays a decisive role.

4 - Peripheral Capitalism:^{1/}

The two stages of their integration into the international capitalist system must be distinguished here.

^{1/} Dependent and under-developed capitalist countries of contemporary Asia, Latin America and Africa.

The characteristic of the first stage is the absence of import substitution industries. To say that there are no import substitution industries amounts to saying that there is no capitalist mode in the social formation, but only the domination of the external capitalist mode over dominated local pre-capitalist modes of production. At this stage, therefore, there is neither an urban, nor a rural proletariat.

There are no towns in this model, except possibly the remains of past formations (the case of the Arab world and of Asia). In the social formations of this type which come closest to the "pure" model (such as the trade economy of Africa south of the Sahara or the colonial economy of Latin America from the 16th to the 19th century, particularly in Brazil, in the West Indies etc...) there are no real towns, but only relay stages in the exploitation of the rural area.

The second stage, the contemporary stage, is characterized by the development of locally established industries. Therefore there is henceforth in the peripheral social formation a locally established capitalist mode. It is of course a peripheral capitalist mode, that is, a mode benefiting at the same time, from cheap labour and a modern technology.

We have here therefore this peripheral capitalist mode and dominated pre-capitalist modes of production, geographically located in the rural area but also in the towns (dominated petty merchant sector in the context of marginalization etc...). Therefore, in the town-country analysis specific to advanced peripheral capitalism, stress much be laid on the different modes of production constituting the social formation, and not on the technical division of labour.