

From Global to Local: Railways and Agrarian Crisis in Britain and France 1870-1900

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Agrarian Crisis and Transition 1870-1900

Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question* (1899)

- Paradox: declining economic importance of the agrarian sector while issues of agrarian politics were growing in significance
 - Protection in the German tariff of 1879
 - Protection in the French tariff of 1885
 - Free trade in Britain, Denmark, etc. in face of mobilized agrarian interests
- Heart of the Matter
 - Extension of the agrarian frontier to the U.S., Canada, Australia, Russia
 - Drop in transport costs intensified competition for Western and Central European farmers
 - Integration and expansion of global markets for capital and commodities
- Connected elements
 - Extension of parliamentary democracy to rural populations by expanding the franchise after 1870
 - Family farming survives through self-exploitation.

Agrarian Crisis and Transition 1870-1900

Why reexamine Kautsky's *The Agrarian Question* (1899)?

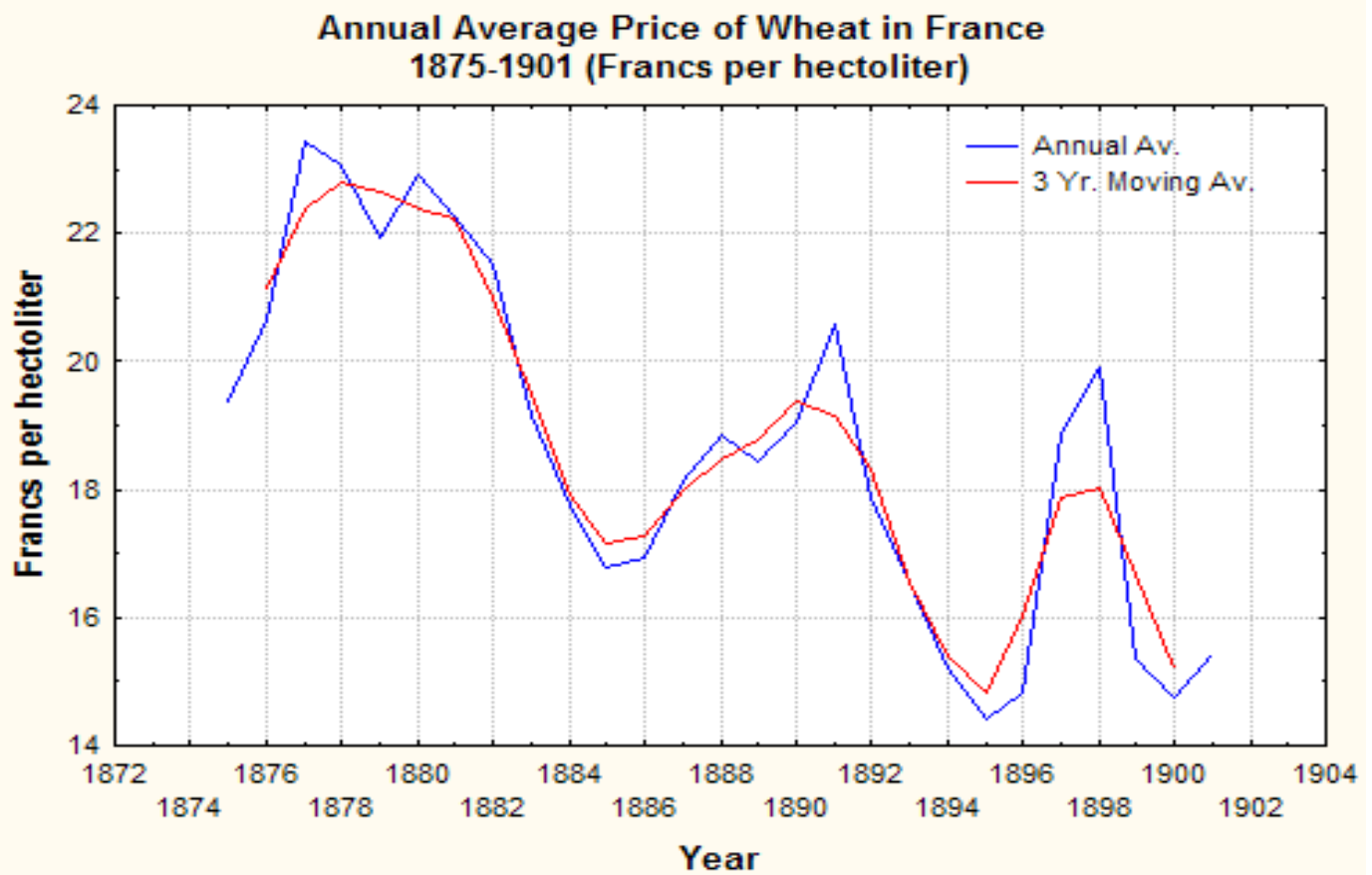
- “The Farm Problem” is still with us. Half of the world's population engaged in agriculture.
- Economic historians re-interpret and diminish the agrarian depression/crisis of 1880s and 1890s.
- Pursue the relationship between railways and the crisis
- Opportunity to study the interconnectivity of geographic scales: global, national, regional, and local.

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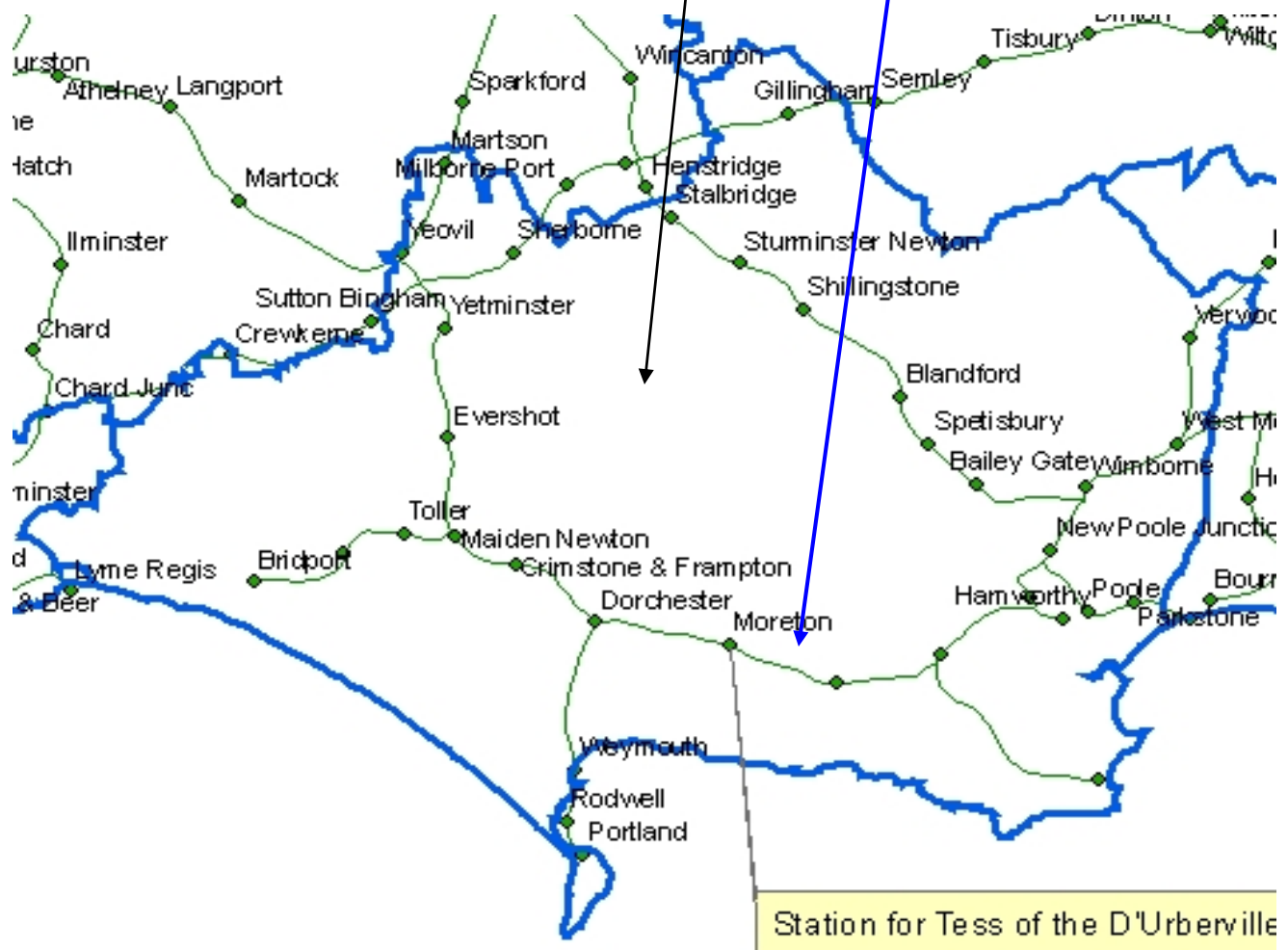
Agrarian Distress: Annual Price of Wheat Prices in France 1874-1901



Dorset and the Agrarian Crisis

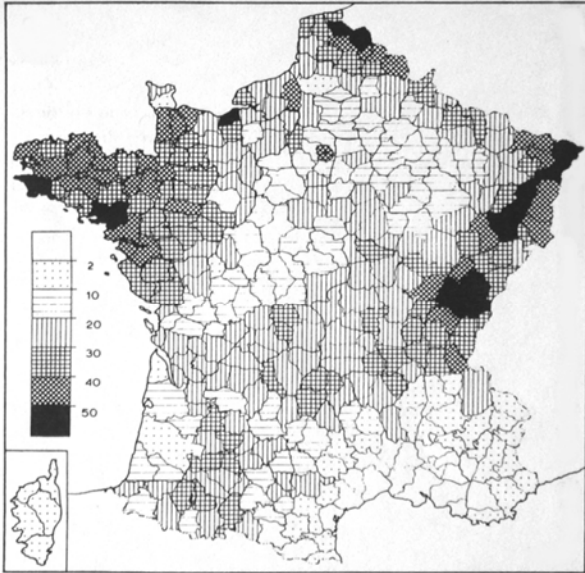
- 1/5 of all farmers left farming from 1875 to 1902
- But new entrants increased the total number of farmers by about 1/5 during the years 1881-1901
- crisis most severe in the chalklands of central Dorset
- crisis less severe in grazing and dairying vales and river valleys

Railways and Stations 1876

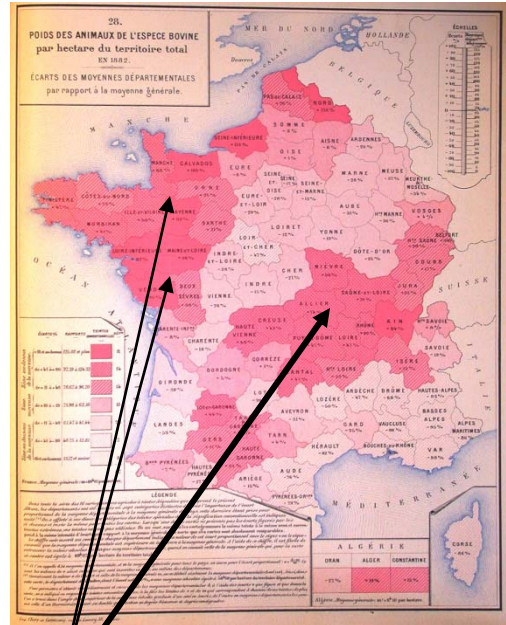


Geography of animal husbandry by density of cattle in 1837 and 1882

Hugh Clout, *Agriculture in France on the Eve of the Railway Age*, (Totowa, NJ, 1980), p.179.



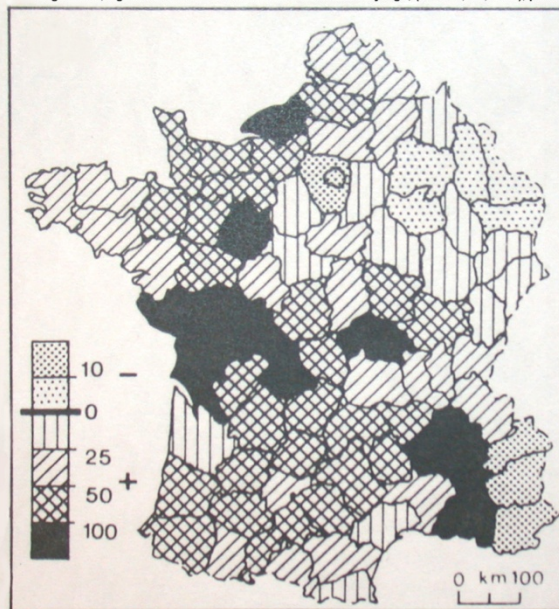
Density of Cattle per 10 Ha
1837



1882

expansion

Hugh Clout, *Agriculture in France on the Eve of the Railway Age*, (Totowa, NJ, 1980), p.104.



Percentage Change in Cattle, 1837 - 1912.

Percentage change, on 1837-1914

Conclusion

- The agrarian crisis of the late 19th century was a dramatic phase of globalization.
- The crisis and the responses of farmers and governments need to be studied at various geographic scales—the transnational, the national, the regional, and the local.