

**Alexander V. Chayanov** ([Russian](#): Александр Васильевич Чаянов) (1888-October 3, 1937) was a [Soviet](#) agrarian [economist](#) and scholar of [rural sociology](#).

He was a proponent of [agricultural cooperation](#), but was skeptical with respect to the indiscriminate introduction of large-scale farms. Chayanov's skepticism was rooted in the idea that [households](#), especially [peasant](#) households which practice [subsistence farming](#), will tend to produce only the amount of food that they need to survive. He believed that the Soviet government would find it difficult to force these households to cooperate and produce a surplus. These views were sharply criticized by [Stalin](#) as "defence of the [kulaks](#)". However, Chayanov was ultimately shown to be right about the problems with Soviet agricultural planning.

In 1930 Chayanov was arrested in the "Case of the Labour Peasant Party" (Трудовая крестьянская партия), fabricated by the [NKVD](#). The name of the party was taken from a [science fiction](#) book written by Chayanov in the 1920s. The process was intended to be a [show trial](#), but it fell apart, due to the strong will of the defendants. Nevertheless on a [secret trial](#) in 1932 Chayanov was sentenced to 5 years in [Kazakhstan labor camps](#). On October 3, 1937 Chayanov was arrested again, tried and shot the same day.

His wife was repressed as well and spent 18 years in [labor camps](#). Chayanov was [rehabilitated](#) in 1987.

Chayanov's major works, *Peasant Farm Organization* (originally published in Russian in 1925) and *On the Theory of Non-Capitalist Economic Systems* were first translated into English in 1966. Chayanov's theory of the peasant household influenced [economic anthropology](#). The substantivist [Marshall Sahlins](#) drew on Chayanov in his theory of the domestic mode of production, but later authors have argued that Chayanov's use of [neo-classical economics](#) supports a formalist position.

His book *Puteshestvie moego brata Alekseia v stranu krest'ianskoi utopii* [My brother Alexei's journey into the land of peasant utopia] (Moskva: Gosizdat, 1920) predicted a rapid transfer of power into peasant hands; its hero wakes up in 1984, "in a country where the village has conquered the city, where handicraft cooperatives have replaced industry." Like [Evgeny Zamyatin's](#) *We*, it contains theosophical elements.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Consumption-labour-balance principle

The higher the ratio of dependents to workers in a household, the harder the workers have to work. Chayanov proposed that peasants would work as hard as they needed in order to meet their subsistence needs, but had no incentive beyond those needs and therefore would slow and stop working once they were met. The principle, which is called the [consumption-labour-balance principle](#), is therefore that labour will increase until it meets (balances) the needs (consumption) of the household. This view of peasant farming implies that it will not develop into capitalism without some external, added factor. Furthermore, the peasant's way of life is seen as ideologically<sup>[citation needed]</sup> opposed to capitalism in that the family work for a living, not for a profit. **In practice**

In practice, the consumption-labour-balance principle means that accounting is not as precise on a farm than in a regular financial capitalist company. This, as there is no separation between capital and labour. Accounting works with a artificial cost structure which charges all kinds of costs which in reality, a farm does not have. For example, wage and farm-grown animals as well as organic

fertiliser and animal feed are charged against commercial (artificial) fertiliser and composed animal feeds. A bought tractor is written off in 4 years against the bought value while the farmer often buys a second secondhand tractor and carries along with it for another 15 years.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Chayanov's influence

Chayanov's ideas have survived him. His work was rediscovered by Westerners in the mid-1960s. Agricultural sociologists, anthropologists and ethnologists working in developing countries, where the peasant economy remains a predominant factor, apply his theory to help understand the nature of the family labour farm. [Halil Inalcik](#), the leading historian of the [Ottoman Empire](#), applied his ideas to peasant land tenure in the Ottoman Empire.

Beginning in the mid 1990s, [Vladimir Megre's](#) *Ringing Cedars* series have many points in common with Chayanov.<sup>[3]</sup>

## References

1. <sup>^</sup> Thomas Lahusen in V. Y. Mudimbe, ed., *Nations, Identities, Cultures* (Duke University Press, 1997: [ISBN 0822320657](#)), p. 128.
2. <sup>^</sup> "[Sterk Gemengd](#)," EOS magazine March 2009.
3. <sup>^</sup> Leonid Sharashkin, [The socioeconomic and cultural significance of food gardening in the Vladimir region of Russia](#), Phd Dissertation, University of Missouri–Columbia May 2008 p.237