

UDC 94(477):316.35(477-22):001.891
DOI <https://doi.org/10.32999/ksu2786-5118/2026-55-4>

THE SCHOLARLY LEGACY OF M.D. BEREZOVCHUK IN THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEES OF POOR PEASANTS: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

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The article presents a comprehensive historiographical analysis of M. D. Berezovchuk's scholarly legacy in the study of the committees of poor peasants (CPPs) in Ukraine. The research is relevant because Soviet historiography requires reassessment and Berezovchuk's place in the study of the CPPs needs clearer definition. Although his works strongly influenced views of the CPPs in the social and political life of the Ukrainian countryside, his scholarly legacy has not previously been the subject of a separate comprehensive study. **Purpose of the study.** To identify the main features of Berezovchuk's approach to CPP history, determine his contribution to the study of the subject, and examine how his works are used and assessed in contemporary Ukrainian and English-language scholarship. **Methodological framework.** The study combines the principles of historicism, objectivity, and systematic analysis with historical-biographical, problem-chronological, historiographical, and comparative-historical methods.

Conclusions. The article examines the main areas of Berezovchuk's research on the CPPs. His major contributions were the synthesis of a substantial body of sources, the systematization of knowledge about CPP activity, and the introduction of documentary materials into scholarship. His works strongly influenced Soviet historiography of the subject. However, the Marxist-Leninist theory of class struggle led him to present the CPPs as a natural pillar of Soviet power. As a result, he paid too little attention to regional differences, the internal diversity of the peasantry, and conflicts between the state and the countryside.

The research finds that English-language historians used Berezovchuk's works selectively. James E. Mace and Daria Mattingly drew factual information from them but explained the role of the CPPs through political control, coercion, and the participation of local agents in Soviet policy. Berezovchuk's works therefore remain important for the materials they contain and for understanding Soviet historical writing. Contemporary scholars check his conclusions against other sources and often revise them.

Keywords: agrarian policy; historiography; committees of poor peasants (CPPs); M. D. Berezovchuk; Soviet historiography; Soviet power; Ukrainian peasantry.

НАУКОВИЙ ДОРОБОК М.Д. БЕРЕЗОВЧУКА У ВИСВІТЛЕННІ ІСТОРІЇ КОМІТЕТІВ НЕЗАМОЖНИХ СЕЛЯН: ІСТОРІОГРАФІЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ

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У статті здійснено комплексний історіографічний аналіз наукового доробку М. Д. Березовчука у висвітленні історії комітетів незаможних селян (КНС) в Україні. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена потребою переосмислити спадщину радянської історіографії та визначити місце праць М. Д. Березовчука в розвитку досліджень КНС. Попри істотний вплив його робіт на уявлення про роль КНС у суспільно-політичному житті українського села, наукова спадщина історика досі не була предметом окремого комплексного аналізу. **Мета дослідження.** Визначити особливості наукового підходу М. Д. Березовчука до історії КНС, з'ясувати його внесок у вивчення проблеми та встановити, як його праці використовують і оцінюють у сучасній українській та англomовній літературі. **Методологічна основа.** Застосовано принципи історизму, об'єктивності й системності, а також історико-біографічний, проблемно-хронологічний, історіографічний і порівняльно-історичний методи.

Висновки. Проаналізовано основні напрями наукової діяльності М. Д. Березовчука, присвячені історії КНС. Установлено, що його вагомими здобутками стали узагальнення значного масиву джерел, систематизація знань про діяльність КНС і введення до наукового обігу документальних матеріалів. Праці історика суттєво вплинули на радянську історіографію проблеми. Водночас марксистсько-ленінська теорія класової боротьби спонукала автора подавати КНС як закономірну опору радянської влади. Через це він приділяв недостатньо уваги регіональним відмінностям, внутрішній неоднорідності селянства та конфліктам між державою і селом.



У результаті дослідження встановлено, що англomовні історики використовували праці М. Д. Березовчука вибірково. Джеймс Е. Мейс і Дарія Маттінглі брали з них фактичні відомості, але пояснювали роль КНС через політичний контроль, примус та участь місцевих виконавців у радянській політиці. Тому праці Березовчука важливі насамперед завдяки зібраним матеріалам і для розуміння особливостей радянської історичної науки. Сучасні дослідники перевіряють його висновки за іншими джерелами й часто переглядають їх.

Ключові слова: аграрна політика; історіографія; комітети незаможних селян (КНС); М. Д. Березовчук; радянська історіографія; радянська влада; українське селянство.

1. Introduction

M. D. Berezovchuk's scholarly legacy occupies a notable place in Soviet historiography of the Ukrainian peasantry. His works organized a substantial body of documents and offered one of the most consistent Soviet accounts of the history of the committees of poor peasants (CPPs). These works should be assessed by distinguishing the facts he collected from the conclusions shaped by Marxist-Leninist methodology. This distinction helps to define his contribution and the extent to which his conclusions can be used in current research.

Review of Recent Research and Publications.

Since the restoration of Ukraine's independence, scholars have not only added new information about the CPPs but have also revised Berezovchuk's main arguments. O. Hanzha shifted attention from the Soviet thesis of “socialist construction” to changes in the peasantry during the consolidation of Soviet rule (Hanzha, 2006). M. Frolov confirmed the links between the CPPs and the party apparatus described by Berezovchuk but explained them as a mechanism of party-state control rather than an expression of poor-peasant initiative (Frolov, 2009). O. Melnychuk clarified the economic functions of the CPPs through the cooperative movement in Podillia (Melnichuk, 2002). V. Voloshenko showed regional differences in CPP organization and refined the general model for all of Ukraine (Voloshenko, 2009). H. Kapustian directly questioned the view of the CPPs as a united representative of poor-peasant interests, emphasizing conflict and lumpen traits among some activists (Kapustian, 2017). E. Levandovska traced CPP activity to 1933 and assessed the committees mainly as agents of Soviet policy in the countryside (Levandovska, 2013).

Contemporary historians use the material collected by Berezovchuk, refine some of his observations, and revise his general account of CPP history. Yet his scholarly legacy has usually received only passing attention. B. Andrusyshyn's biographical entry describes Berezovchuk's life and career but does not systematically examine his views of the CPPs (Andrusyshyn, 2003). Scholars have also paid too little attention to how his works are used and assessed in English-language historiography. Documents of the period and Soviet scholarship widely used the abbreviated term *komnezamy*. This article retains it only in titles and when explaining terminology of the period; otherwise, it uses “committees of poor peasants” and the abbreviation “CPPs.”

The purpose of the study is to provide a historiographical analysis of Berezovchuk's scholarly legacy in the study of the CPPs. The article identifies the main areas of his research, describes the sources and methods used in his works, compares his conclusions with later Ukrainian and English-language studies, and assesses the importance of his legacy for the history of the Ukrainian peasantry.

The methodological framework combines the principles of historicism, objectivity, and systematic analysis. The historical-biographical method traces the formation of Berezovchuk's views; the problem-chronological method identifies the stages of his scholarly work; the historiographical method defines the main arguments of his publications; and the comparative-historical method compares his conclusions with current approaches. Analysis and synthesis help to summarize his work and explain how it was used later.

The scientific novelty of the article lies in its overall assessment of the factual contributions and methodological limits of Berezovchuk's works, its comparison of his conclusions with current Ukrainian research, and its analysis of how his publications are cited and reassessed in English-language historiography.

2. Formation of M. D. Berezovchuk's Scholarly Views

M. D. Berezovchuk (1920–1996) belonged to a generation of Soviet historians who worked under ideological control over historical research. After graduating from the Kyiv Pedagogical Institute in 1947, he worked in higher pedagogical education and held administrative positions at institutions in Uzhhorod, Kamianets-Podilskyi, Uman, and Kyiv. His combination of research with work in institutions connected to the Soviet party-state system influenced both his choice of topics and his research approach. At the same time, his broad use and organization of sources gave his works a notable place in the historiography of the CPPs (Andrusyshyn, 2003).

Berezovchuk's scholarly views were shaped by Marxist-Leninist methodology. It treated poor peasants as natural allies of the working class and the CPPs as a social pillar of Soviet power in the countryside. He therefore focused on the creation and development of the CPPs, their role in strengthening Soviet rule, their links with party structures, and their participation in agrarian policy. His views developed during the growth of Soviet agrarian

historiography in the 1950s–1970s, when the history of peasant organizations was explained through “socialist construction.” This context shaped his choice of topics and his generally positive assessment of CPP activity.

3. The Concept of the Committees of Poor Peasants in the Works of M. D. Berezovchuk

Berezovchuk viewed the CPPs as one of the main instruments of Soviet rural policy and as a means of involving poor peasants in socialist transformation. This view was based on the Leninist account of the peasant question. Berezovchuk therefore focused on CPP participation in strengthening Soviet authority, carrying out agrarian policy, and combating the so-called kulaks. Local traditions, peasants’ economic interests, differences within CPP membership, and regional variation did not receive enough attention.

By placing CPP activity within Soviet policy toward the Ukrainian peasantry, Berezovchuk offered a broad account of the committees’ role in the social, political, and economic changes of the 1920s. One of his main achievements was the use of laws, party documents, statistics, and earlier scholarship. However, he used most of this evidence to support predetermined claims about the leading role of poor peasants and the inevitability of socialist change in the countryside. As a result, contradictions in CPP activity, differences in their social composition, and the attitudes of various peasant groups toward Soviet policy were not studied separately.

4. Major Works of M. D. Berezovchuk on the History of the Committees of Poor Peasants

In 1965, Berezovchuk published *The Committees of Poor Peasants of Ukraine in the Struggle for Socialism*, one of the first comprehensive studies of CPP history (Berezovchuk, 1965). He described their organizational development and their role in strengthening Soviet rule, restructuring agrarian relations, and mobilizing poor peasants. For its time, the book was one of the fullest studies of the subject. However, Berezovchuk organized the material around the thesis of “socialist construction,” so CPP development appeared to be a natural and mainly positive process. He examined the committees’ links with party and state institutions in detail but gave too little attention to social tension, peasant resistance, and the mixed consequences of Soviet policy.

Another area of Berezovchuk’s work was the publication of sources. Together with T. M. Kolisher, P. K. Stoian, and V. V. Sukharyev, he edited the collection of documents and memoirs *The Party’s Support in the Countryside* (1971), devoted to CPP activity (*The Party’s Support in the Countryside*, 1971). The volume introduced national and local materials into scholarship, including memoirs of

CPP activists and party and Komsomol officials. However, the selection reflected the official Soviet view, so conflicts, abuses, and critical peasant attitudes were much less visible. The collection is valuable as a source of evidence and as an example of how the Soviet account of the CPPs was formed.

Works on historiography also occupy an important place in Berezovchuk’s legacy. When he discussed earlier and contemporary authors, he focused mainly on how fully they described the role of poor peasants and CPP participation in state policy. These texts are valuable for two reasons: they show how the subject was studied in the second half of the twentieth century and reveal the criteria Soviet historians used to define certain explanations as ideologically “correct” (Berezovchuk, 1976, p. 139).

Berezovchuk explained the emergence of the CPPs mainly through the needs of Bolshevik rural policy. This approach oversimplified differences between regions. Later research has shown a more complex combination of military, political, and socio-economic factors, as well as substantial regional variation. Berezovchuk’s conclusions are therefore important for understanding the development of CPP studies, but they must be checked against new sources and current research approaches (Hanzha, 2006, pp. 7–10; Voloshenko, 2009).

In the article “Poor Peasants’ Committees and Komnezamy of Ukraine in Historiography” (1976), Berezovchuk summarized the main Soviet approaches to the study of rural poor organizations. He aimed to organize existing research and identify directions for further work. However, he judged earlier authors mainly by whether their works agreed with official ideas about class struggle and socialist change in the countryside. The article is therefore useful both as a literature review and as an example of how Soviet historians evaluated works on this subject (Berezovchuk, 1976, pp. 137–144).

Berezovchuk made extensive use of statistics to support his conclusions. The figures he collected make it possible to trace CPP membership, organizational networks, and specific areas of activity. Yet the statistics usually confirmed his main arguments and were rarely checked critically. He did not always consider the origin and completeness of the data or the differences between official reports and local practice (Berezovchuk, 1970, p. 129).

Berezovchuk thus produced the most comprehensive Soviet account of CPP history. Its strengths were the broad source base, the organization of factual material, and close attention to institutions and organizations. However, he focused on the strengthening of Soviet power and the mobilization of poor peasants. Peasant resistance, internal conflicts within the CPPs, and conflict between the state and the countryside remained secondary.

5. M. D. Berezovchuk's Polemic with Foreign Historiography and the Use of His Works in English-Language Research

A distinctive place in Berezovchuk's work belongs to the article “Anti-Marxist American Historiography on the Activities of Rural Poor Organizations in Ukraine” (1988). In it, he argued against Merle Fainsod, Moshe Lewin, James E. Mace, and other Western authors who emphasized the coercive nature of Bolshevik agrarian policy, the social diversity of the peasantry, and the use of the CPPs as a means of control. Berezovchuk called these conclusions “bourgeois falsification” and opposed them with the thesis of an alliance between the working class and poor peasants (Berezovchuk, 1988, pp. 78–91).

This polemic was mainly ideological. Berezovchuk relied on Lenin's writings, party documents, and Soviet statistics, while considering other views and their evidence selectively. Even so, the article remains a useful source for historians. It shows which Western arguments were seen as a threat to the Soviet account of rural history in the late 1980s and reveals the limits of acceptable debate in Soviet historical scholarship.

English-language historians did not ignore Berezovchuk's works. James E. Mace's article “The Komitety Nezamozhnykh Selyan and the Structure of Soviet Rule in the Ukrainian Countryside, 1920–1933” cites several of his publications (Mace, 1983). Mace used factual information collected by the Soviet historian but explained the role of the CPPs differently. He viewed them not as an independent organization of poor peasants but as part of the system of Soviet rule that was intended to offset the regime's weakness in the countryside and enforce political control.

Later English-language historians also used Berezovchuk's works selectively. In her dissertation on rank-and-file perpetrators of the Holodomor, Daria Mattingly cites The Committees of Poor Peasants of Ukraine in the Struggle for Socialism among Soviet works that contain information on women's participation in the CPPs. (Mattingly, 2019).

The English-language studies identified here do not provide a separate, comprehensive assessment of Berezovchuk's entire scholarly legacy. Their authors referred only to individual works, statistics, and documentary selections and explained them differently

from Berezovchuk. The facts he collected have remained more valuable than his methodology.

This evidence helps define Berezovchuk's place in historiography more precisely. He worked within the ideological limits of Soviet scholarship but also collected a substantial body of evidence that English-language historians used. Citation does not mean agreement with his conclusions: contemporary scholars check, refine, and criticize them.

6. Conclusions

The analysis shows that M. D. Berezovchuk occupies an important place in the historiography of the CPPs. In his works, he organized a substantial body of archival materials, statistics, and laws and produced one of the most coherent Soviet accounts of CPP history. The broad source base and attention to institutions and organizations explain the lasting influence of his research.

Berezovchuk's views were based on the Marxist-Leninist theory of class struggle. He therefore treated the CPPs as a social pillar of Soviet power, a means of political mobilization, and an agent of agrarian change. This approach helped him describe their organizational development and links with party structures in detail, but it limited his analysis of peasant interests, resistance, regional differences, and the internal diversity of poor peasants.

English-language studies show how Berezovchuk's work was later used. James E. Mace drew on the facts Berezovchuk collected but viewed the CPPs as part of the system of Soviet rule. Daria Mattingly used his monograph as a source of information on CPP membership and activity and checked it against other evidence. M. Berezovchuk gathered valuable factual evidence, which was recognized by researchers, including those abroad, but his conclusions appeared to them to be politically biased.

Berezovchuk's scholarly legacy is important for two reasons: it contains a large body of organized evidence on the CPPs and reflects the Soviet approach to their history. Contemporary scholars use his factual material selectively, refine particular points, and revise his general account of CPP activity. This critical approach makes it possible to define the place of the CPPs in Soviet governance and in changes to the Ukrainian peasantry during the 1920s and early 1930s more precisely.

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Date of initial submission: 19.06.2026

Date of acceptance after peer review: 15.08.2026

Publication date: 05.10.2026